

Tests

MOBILE PHONES

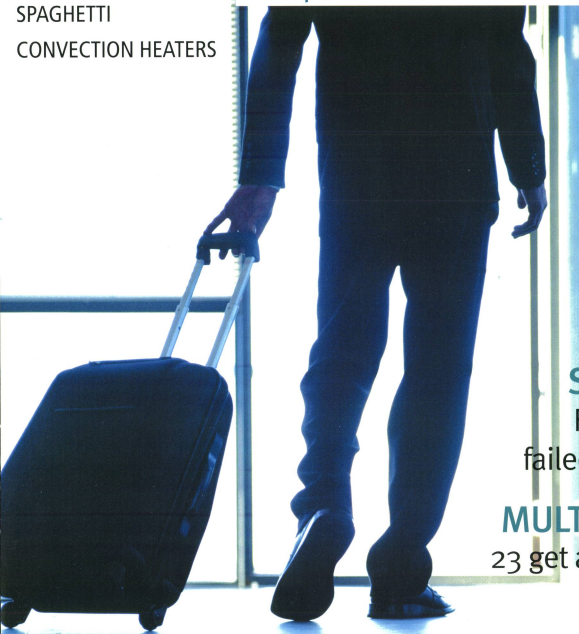
RANGEHOODS

SPAGHETTI

CONVECTION HEATERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers



JOGGER STROLLERS

Four out of 10
failed safety tests

MULTIVITAMINS

23 get a value check

Domestic airlines

Who's winning the customer war?

COMING SOON...

Multipurpose ladders

They look like a good idea, but it's hard to find one that's really safe.



Shortbread biscuits

Surprise, surprise — our tasters preferred the ones made to the original recipe.



Vacuum cleaners

Is it worth spending \$600–\$800?



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A good result

It makes a nice change to report a result in consumers' favour, but in this issue there's good news about something you've complained long and loud about — airlines printing airfares in bits and pieces (the fare here, a tax there, a fee somewhere else), with the full price clearly stated nowhere. We even published subscriber letters complaining about it in the May issue.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) agreed with you, and asked the Federal Government to address the issue. And it has. It's announced changes to the Trade Practices Act to require all businesses to prominently disclose the full, single-figure price for any goods or services they sell (see page 4). That's a win that will satisfy many consumers.

While on the subject of airlines, this issue's report on a survey of subscriber preferences with the three major domestic airlines makes fascinating reading. Among many other things, you get really frustrated when you can't use your QANTAS Frequent Flyer points when you want to; you hate having to hunt for a seat on Jetstar; but most of you appreciate Virgin Blue's friendly (if "different") staff. If you can relate to some of those reactions, check out the full story on page 8.

And a few surprises from our Home Tester spaghetti taste test results showed us our ideas were a bit behind the times for this great dinnertime staple. According to our tasters, Australian spaghetti is nowadays just as good as Italian and you don't even need to buy it from a deli — supermarket spag is just fine. See page 29 for more on the nation's favourite pasta.



Jane Mackenzie,
Editor

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CHOICE subscribers vote for their favourite domestic airline.

Photo: Getty Images

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PRICE RISE

Due to increasing costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is going up. The new prices, effective from the August 2005 issue, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly \$17.25, one year \$69, two years \$128.
- Institution/company subscribers: one year \$110, two years \$210.
- CHOICE plus CHOICE Online: quarterly \$26.75.
- Voting membership: \$98.70 per year.

If you've subscribed within the last year, the price you pay will be held constant for your first year.

Basketball hoop alert

Horrific injuries suffered by Western Australian schoolboy Terry Vo have highlighted the potential dangers of backyard basketball hoops, or rings as they're also called. Ten-year-old Terry had both of his hands and his left foot severed after a wall collapsed on him when he 'slam-dunked' the hoop at a friend's birthday party in March this year.

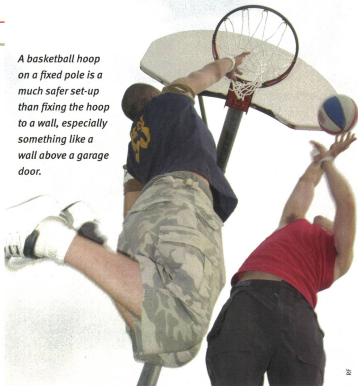
In Victoria since 1996, three people have died in accidents related to basketball hoops. The dangers are caused by improper installation of the hoop itself and/or hanging onto the hoop, especially after a 'slam-dunk' — when a player leaps into the air and forces the ball directly through the ring. While this move looks impressive, it can be very dangerous.

Robert Caulfield, Managing Director of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' building advisory service, Archicentre, says people are deceived if they believe a brick wall can withstand the pressure put on it from continual slam-dunking. In particular, one of the most common places to install a basketball hoop is on the wall above a garage door, which is really "only built to withstand the wind", he says.

Currently, Victoria is the only state in Australia that has legislation requiring manufacturers to put warning and usage labels on hoops. Standards Australia is currently researching correct use of basketball hoops and hopes to develop national safety guidelines.

In the meantime, to avoid further tragedies, never swing or hang onto a home hoop, and don't let children do it either. If you've got a basketball hoop attached to a single-skin brick wall, such as above a garage door, remove it at once. Get approval from a structural engineer before attaching a ring and backboard to any structure, and make sure it's bolted through the framework of the building rather than just the brickwork.

A basketball hoop on a fixed pole is a much safer set-up than fixing the hoop to a wall, especially something like a wall above a garage door.



Follow the manufacturer's instructions to the letter when assembling and attaching the hoop, and frequently check its attachment fittings and the supporting structure you've attached it to, as both can deteriorate with time. In fact Archicentre recommends instead buying a basketball ring attached to a pole, or a custom-made one.

Want to know more? Contact Basketball Australia on (02) 9764 3482 or go to www.basketball.net.au for its guidelines on safe installation of basketball hoops.

Finally: just one airfare price

You've complained long and loud about so-called component pricing — just last month, on the letters page, we published your complaints about airlines' increasing tendency to advertise a fare price in its component parts, with charges, levies and taxes stated separately, rather than a single, all-inclusive fare. Now it's on the way out.

Following a request by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to address the issue, the Australian Government recently announced changes to the *Trade Practices Act 1974* that will require businesses to disclose prominently the full, single-figure cash price for the goods or services they sell. Businesses can still include component prices, but the total must be prominently displayed.

The proposed legislative changes mean you'll no longer have to calculate the total price yourself and will be able to compare prices more easily.

The Australian Government intends to liaise with state and territory governments so that equivalent changes are undertaken in all jurisdictions.

UPDATE

ACCC DISCONTINUES PROCEEDINGS AGAINST PEST FREE

PLUG IN PEST FREE is an electronic device that was claimed to repel insects and vermin. Late last year the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) discontinued proceedings against its distributor, **PEST FREE AUSTRALIA** (reported on in *Choice Cuts*, May 2003 and July 2004), following the Federal Court's acceptance of several undertakings by **PEST FREE**. These included modification of its advertising to remove a number of claims about the product's effectiveness.

CORRECTION

DIGITAL CAMERAS

CHOICE, October 2004

The **SAMSUNG Digimax V4** is supplied with a lithium ion battery in Australia, not a CR-V3 as stated in the table on page 13. However, it can also use CR-V3 and non-rechargeable alkaline batteries, and was tested in Europe using CR-V3 batteries. It's likely its battery performance will be better than indicated by our score (37%) when using the lithium ion battery supplied here.

Photo prints direct from your camera

Printer docks connect to your digital camera and allow you to print standard-sized prints without the use of a computer. You need a camera designed for a printer dock or that's PictBridge-enabled, or you can use a memory card if the printer dock has a memory card slot.

Ideally, you want speedy, high-quality prints at a reasonable price. Our sister magazine, *Computer CHOICE*, put three printer dock models through their paces to find out if they deliver.

PRINT QUALITY

The printer docks on test all use a dye-sublimation printing process, in which layers of coloured dye — yellow, magenta and cyan — are added one at a time to the paper to create an image. The pigments in the dye evaporate and then solidify on the surface of the paper. The printhead adds one layer of dye, then pulls the paper back into the body of the dock to add the next layer. Some professional dye-sublimation processes also use a grey dye to help produce better black, but none of the printer docks tested uses a grey dye.

Computer CHOICE connected a 5.1 megapixel camera to each of the printer docks to produce sets of prints from the same source. The same images were also printed by a professional photographic printer. An expert panel used the professional prints as a reference to see how well the printer dock prints compared.

The panel thought all the printer docks produced prints that were fine for 'happy snaps' but were of visibly lower quality than professionally produced prints of the same image.

COSTS

Even if you don't include the cost of the printer dock itself, your local photo lab is probably cheaper than any of the tested docks, given the cost per print (based on the cost of paper and dye refills).

Printer dock	Price (\$)	Refills	Cost per print (¢)
CANON Selphy CP400	299	\$35 for 36 sheets	97
KODAK EasyShare Printer Dock Plus	339	\$39.90 for 40 sheets	100
SONY DPPEX50	399	\$26.95 for 25 sheets	108

In summary, none of the docks tested represents good value for money, but if you're really keen to print direct from your digital camera, they're certainly very convenient.

If you'd like to subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



TAMARA GRAMHAM

WHO TO COMPLAIN TO?

It's not always easy to find out which organisation could help you sort out a consumer problem, but now there's help at hand if you've a reason to complain but don't know who to address your gripe to.

The *Australian Consumer Handbook*, published by the federal Treasury department, lists more than 730 organisations — industry, community and government — that offer dispute resolution services in Australia. It also has information on what to consider before you buy, how to complain if anything goes wrong (including sample letters of demand), and answers to frequently asked questions on scams, warranties and refunds.

For a free copy of the handbook, call the consumer publication hotline on 1300 305 866 or complete the online order form at www.consumersonline.gov.au.

You can also view, download or search the handbook online, if you're looking for, say, the consumer organisations in your area or the relevant organisations for a specific subject matter. The website lists contact details and a brief description of the organisations.

UPDATE

FRIDGES

CHOICE, May 2005

The WESTINGHOUSE R5645V side-by-side fridge, reported on in the table on page 44, has been upgraded to a more energy-efficient model but still has the same model number. The manufacturer, Electrolux, didn't tell us this when we did our availability checks before publication.

In addition, in the *What to buy* list on page 39, our Best Buy logo 'slipped' — under the 451–525 L size range, it should have been next to the FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T; it was correct in the profiles on page 42.

THANK YOU

We'd like to express our sincere thanks for the kind donation we received from Mr and Mrs J Almgren of NSW who, for the third year in a row, acknowledged our work for consumers with a generous donation. The Consumers' Association (publisher of *CHOICE*) is a non-profit organisation funded solely by the sales of *CHOICE* and our other products, so we're always very grateful for donations from subscribers.



When a cot is a chair is a bed ...

Following our report on cots in CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005, we recently tested another new cot, the **STOKKE Sleepi**, which you might have come across and wondered about if you're in the market for a cot. It's a solid and versatile cot, with a number of good features:

- Compact size.
- Two height positions for the mattress base.
- Lockable castors.
- Can be assembled as a regular cot or into two small chairs.
- With some extra parts, it can be converted from a small cot for a newborn to a longer bed for an older child.

These features come at a price. It costs \$1200, significantly more than most cots, and it's also more complex to assemble, with — believe it or not — 109 parts (plus supplied tools). A major drawback is that it doesn't have a dropside, so your back may suffer lifting your baby in and out — while the upper mattress level is high enough to reach without bending much, you can only use it while your child is too young to sit up.

Unfortunately, the cot didn't comply with one mandatory clause of the Australian standard regarding limb entrapment, though only by a few millimetres and only in a few places. Its documentation says it passes the standard, and we suspect manufacturing variations from sample to sample may

account for the one we tested failing. It also failed another clause relating to finger entrapment, though the holes in question would normally be covered by the mattress.

These failures aren't a major hazard for babies, but there's still a small risk of discomfort or injury. And, of course, a cot shouldn't be on the market if it fails the safety clauses of the standard.

The distributor (Scandinavian Baby — the cot's from Norway) says it's taking action to fix these minor faults, but this example highlights again the need for care when buying a cot. Examine the model carefully before you buy, and again after assembly — have you put it together correctly, and are there any obvious faults? See the Jan/Feb article for what to look for.



TAMARA CROOKAM

UPDATE

CLOTHES DRYERS

CHOICE, April 2005

Contrary to what was published in the table on page 44, the manufacturer has since informed us that the **KLEENMAID KED 300** has reverse tumbling, can be stacked on top of a washing machine, and that an optional kit is available to duct the hot, moist air out of your laundry.

Can you help?

LEGAL FEES

For an article in our sister publication, *CHOICE Money & Rights*, we'd like to hear about any experiences you've had with 'no-win, no-fee' legal arrangements or unexpected legal fees.

We'd be especially interested if you:

- Have entered a 'no-win, no-fee' arrangement with a lawyer.
- Have received a bill from a lawyer that you think was too high.
- Have any tips on how to avoid unexpected legal fees.

Please write to **Legal fees** at *CHOICE Money & Rights*, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email to legalfees@choice.com.au.

yourletters

Dead pixels and digital cameras

I wonder how many people are aware that digital cameras can suffer pixel degradation, like LCD computer monitors or TV screens?

I bought a FUJIFILM FinePix S602 Zoom six-megapixel camera two years ago after a favourable review in CHOICE. I've been very pleased with the camera — until now. A small circular black spot has appeared in the viewfinder next to the crosshairs and appears on all my pictures (see the photo, right).

After phoning several digital camera repairers, I gather this isn't uncommon. Apparently pixels can deteriorate over time and the CCD (charge coupled device: the light-sensitive chip in the camera used for image gathering) has to be replaced. I was given an estimate of \$250 for repair — about one-third of the cost of buying a new model of the same camera.

It's possible to digitally correct the pictures using computer software, which is what I do. But not everyone will be able to do this.

Two years' use out of an expensive camera (it cost around \$1500 when purchased) is not good enough. Are we supposed to regard digital cameras as just another disposable electronic item, to be replaced every few years? By contrast, the SLR I bought in the 1970s has never

needed repair and will probably last a lifetime.

Philip Powell
Wembley Downs, WA

We agree with Philip: two years' use from a \$1500 camera is not good enough. An expensive item like this should be expected to have a life longer than two years, and faults may be covered by statutory warranty rights (under the Trade Practices Act) for longer than the time specified in the manufacturer's warranty (which is a voluntary warranty).

Statutory rights also involve the question of whether the fault is a major one, and with the case of pixel damage, that's a very contentious area. Many TV and computer monitor warranties consider a certain number of dead pixels still allows acceptable viewing, and don't cover pixel damage — although it may depend also on where they are (in the middle or near the edge of the screen) and whether they're scattered (so they're less noticeable) or bunched together.

As the photo above shows, the damaged pixels in Philip's camera cause the image quality to be substantially diminished. And while it can be fixed with software (some of which can be obtained free on the internet), not everyone uses a computer with their digital



camera — for example, images may be printed straight from the memory card in shops, or using a printer with a camera dock at home. And it could prove too challenging for those who aren't very computer-literate.

We took up Philip's case with FUJIFILM, and it's now fixed the camera without charge.

Gas guzzlers

While I really enjoyed the feature article on the energy industry (CHOICE, March 2005) and learning the issues for consumers, I was shocked to see an article about outdoor gas heaters in the same issue.

In my opinion, these heaters are some of the most inefficient appliances invented. Surely, in full knowledge of global warming, CHOICE should be focusing on getting these products banned, not promoting them. We have houses to keep us warm in winter

THUMBS UP!



Julie Malgo had her
SUNBEAM steam

station iron only two days before it was accidentally dropped and the plastic casing cracked. She contacted SUNBEAM spare parts division to see if she could replace the broken parts. There were none to be had, but they gave her a whole new iron instead.

— do we really need to heat up the outdoors to pretend we live in the tropics all year round?

Ilana Solo
By email

On average, an Australian household produces eight tonnes of greenhouse gases annually through total energy usage (not including their car). Enthusiastic entertainers using a 40 MJ/hour gas patio heater for 10 hours a week, six months a year, create around another half a tonne of greenhouse gas — a significant amount when we're supposed to be reducing greenhouse emissions. The British environment minister, Elliot Morley, has reportedly urged UK consumers to think twice about buying one of these heaters.

However, CHOICE accepts that subscribers may want to buy certain products, regardless of negative views held about them by others, and we still feel obliged to satisfy subscriber demands to test them.

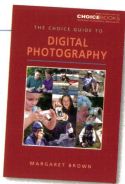
We normally include some sort of environmental impact rating when scoring appliances, usually energy and/or water use. Given the large scale of the environmental impact of this appliance, relative differences between models are fairly meaningless. But not to mention the environmental impacts of patio heaters in the article was an oversight.

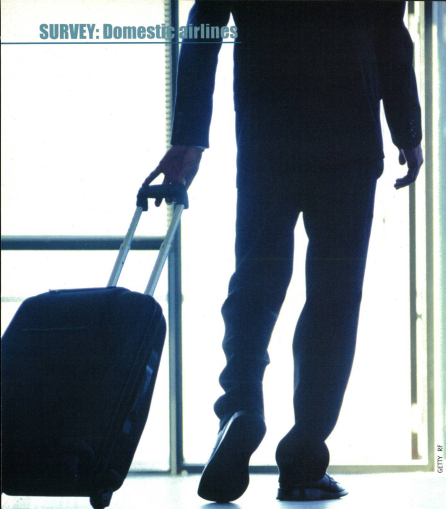
LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Philip Powell of Wembley Downs, WA, receives *The CHOICE Guide to Digital Photography*, or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 39–40.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.





GETTY RF

COME, FLY WITH ME

More than 500 CHOICE and CHOICE Online subscribers give you their verdict on the major domestic airlines.

IN A NUTSHELL

- VIRGIN BLUE clearly beat its budget rival JETSTAR in our survey of customer satisfaction with the major domestic airlines.
- The main gripes? For JETSTAR, no seat allocation and the 30-minute check-in closure policy. For QANTAS, the difficulty of using Frequent Flyer points. For VIRGIN BLUE, very little, although the friendly and 'different' staff praised by most people were 'a bit much' for some.

When we last surveyed consumer satisfaction with airlines eight years ago, the then two major domestic carriers scored very similarly for overall satisfaction. But a lot has changed in the domestic airline market since then. In 2000, after the amendment of foreign ownership rules for Australian domestic airlines, discount airline VIRGIN BLUE entered the domestic market. The following year came the collapse of ANSETT and, just about a year ago, QANTAS launched its low-cost subsidiary JETSTAR.

The new budget airlines have stirred up the domestic airfare market considerably. With ever cheaper airfares on offer, we're certainly benefiting from the increased competition. But is everyone happy getting cheaper fares at the expense of service? Or can we get a discount fare *and* good service?

To find out how satisfied people are with the major domestic airlines, we asked a group of subscribers who'd taken at least one domestic flight within the past 12 months about their experiences of the airlines generally and of their last flight — see page 11 for more on the survey. Thanks to all of you who took part in the survey, and for your valuable comments; they're printed in *italics* throughout the article.



GREG ADAMS

"Cheap and cheerful. No meal, but on a short flight at this cost, who cares? Great flight attendants."

Richard, Adelaide, about VIRGIN BLUE.

CHEERFUL SERVICE A CLEAR WINNER

Of the two budget rivals, **VIRGIN BLUE** clearly beat **JETSTAR** in our survey, with a more than 20% difference in overall rating. Table 1, page 11, gives the overall ratings our survey respondents awarded the domestic airlines they'd flown with in the previous 12 months: **JETSTAR**, **QANTAS**, **REGIONAL EXPRESS (REX)** and **VIRGIN BLUE**.

There's no marked difference between **REX**, **VIRGIN BLUE** and **QANTAS** in the overall ratings, but when reporting on their last flight, our survey respondents rated **VIRGIN BLUE** better than both **QANTAS** and **JETSTAR**, and for almost all the individual aspects we asked them about — see Table 2, page 11, for details. (We didn't have enough responses for **REX** to include it in this table.)

Many were particularly impressed with **VIRGIN BLUE**'s 'different' approach to service, commenting along the lines of:

"Very friendly and down-to-earth attitude, which was a nice change."

"Love the customer service, focus on fun."

"Quite satisfactory and enjoyable due to the antics of the flight crew."

Criticisms of **VIRGIN BLUE** were few and far between, with only a small number commenting negatively on the airline's 'fresh' approach to customer service:

"The 'cute' approach, clearly popular with a younger market, is a bit much for me."

"They sometimes talk to you as if you're kids."

The only aspect for which **VIRGIN BLUE** was rated slightly lower than **QANTAS** was entertainment. That's not surprising, really, as none of the budget airlines provides free headphones. But **VIRGIN BLUE** sells reusable headphones for \$2.50 (**JETSTAR**, too, for \$3, on its Airbus flights) and is looking to provide, from July this year, TV (in conjunction with Foxtel) for an extra \$5.

VIRGIN BLUE is well aware that it's the staff that make the airline. "We wanted to make the flying environment friendlier than people here in Australia had become used to and put the fun back into flying," said **VIRGIN BLUE** spokesperson Amanda Bolger. "Other airlines can't replicate our service and culture."

UNALLOCATED SEATING COPS FLAK

JETSTAR got the thumbs-down from our survey respondents who, on average, only awarded the airline a 47% overall rating and the lowest ratings for almost all aspects we surveyed (the exception was value for money).



"The JETSTAR check-in process is a bit frantic, with no allocated seating. This concept is great in theory, but humans being sheep, it's often easier to take the seat you're directed to than to have too much choice! I also don't like the fact that you can't earn frequent flyer points for QANTAS on this airline, especially given that some routes are now serviced primarily by JETSTAR and not QANTAS. That said, the staff are always friendly and helpful."

Belinda, Lane Cove, NSW.

(Good news for all those who commented on the Frequent Flyer points issue. Since 1 March 2005 **QANTAS** Frequent Flyers can earn points and status credits when flying **JETSTAR** on a JetFlex fare.)

While some people commented positively on **JETSTAR**'s staff, the fact that you don't get an allocated seat, and that check-in closes half an hour before departure, raised the ire of many survey respondents. The quotes below are representative of many we received along similar lines:

"Their ticketing system of lining up to get seats on a plane is ludicrous — a family of four hardly ever gets seats together. Their new system of colour-coding for progression onto the plane has only helped marginally ... I flew three times with Jetstar last year and ... I'll never fly with them again."

"The strict 30-minute check-in policy is inflexible and signifies the inability to provide a friendly service. If you miss the 30-minute check-in you're forced to upgrade to a full fare [on a later flight]. That's very customer-unfriendly and I'll always make every attempt to avoid this airline in future."

According to **JETSTAR**, the unallocated seating system is a cost-saving measure, used by many airlines worldwide, which also provides for increased efficiency and faster turnaround. Spokesperson Simon Westaway said families with young children



GREG MILLER

"I am disgusted with QANTAS and its supposed frequent flyer program. The last four trips I've been unable to use points for travel. The excuses ranged from wrong time of year, limited seat availability, not available on that flight, and book a year ahead. I've kept my points for emergency use for my sons in WA or myself to see them unexpectedly, but to date I've been unable to use them."

Sandra, Mountain Creek, Qld.
Questioned on this frequently mentioned problem, QANTAS

sent its standard reply, which advised that: "Award availability is subject to capacity controls. Availability is regularly monitored and reviewed across the network to ensure member satisfaction is maximised within reasonable commercial limits."

Well, judging by the number of comments we received on this topic, "member satisfaction" is certainly *not* maximised currently. To minimise the problem, QANTAS advises booking as early as possible and choosing flights outside peak times, which include peak business hours and school and public holidays.

are among those allowed to board first; and families with older children should still be able to sit together if they check in early (and so qualify for an earlier-boarding colour code).

On JETSTAR's check-in closure 30 minutes before departure, Mr Westaway said the earlier closure was in line with the airline's focus on on-time performance. Industry statistics confirm the airline's better performance (than QANTAS and VIRGIN BLUE) for on-time departures and arrivals. If someone did miss their flight, Mr Westaway said, they could get on a later JETSTAR flight, if a seat was available, by paying a change fee. Depending on the situation, JETSTAR might also charge for any fare difference.

Some survey respondents were also unimpressed with JETSTAR's food, inflight service and entertainment, three aspects which some simply marked as 'not applicable' (for both budget airlines), probably because they didn't buy food or headphones, or because they didn't care: "No reclining seat or audio, but that's not necessary for a one or two-hour flight."

Bearing in mind that a relatively large number of survey respondents were unhappy with their last

flight with JETSTAR, it comes as no surprise that 52% of the JETSTAR passengers in our survey said they'd choose a different airline if they had to fly to the same destination again, compared with just 16% of VIRGIN BLUE and 9% of QANTAS flyers.

LOYAL TRAVELLERS

Considering its long history on the Australian domestic airline market, it's hardly surprising that the majority of our respondents (just over half) had chosen to fly QANTAS on their last flight (a third had flown with VIRGIN BLUE and 9% with JETSTAR, which was only launched in May last year).

When choosing which airline to fly with, value for money was an important factor for our survey respondents: 43% mentioned it as a reason for choosing an airline. But for each individual carrier, the reasons varied considerably. More than half the QANTAS passengers in our survey considered frequent flyer points when making their choice; for a third better standard of service was a decisive factor. For JETSTAR and VIRGIN BLUE passengers, on the other hand, value for money was much more important.

Some people in our survey chose QANTAS because they'd always done so, and hadn't been disappointed: "I've never experienced any difficulties or problems and rate QANTAS very highly because this has been the case for a long period of time."

Others simply appreciated the "maturity of the cabin crew", or the trimmings and service a full-service carrier provides: "The little extras [with QANTAS] make for a more pleasant flight, but price ultimately determines who I fly with."

In fact it doesn't have to cost that much more: "I enjoy all the inclusive services you receive, and with the deals available, you can pay almost the same as with a discount airline." We agree — see *The benefits of competition*, page 12, for more on this.

On the whole, though, our national carrier's ratings for most aspects of the respondents' last flight were lower than VIRGIN BLUE's, and quite a number of people in our survey had criticisms about flying QANTAS domestically. The reasons for frustration ranged from what was described as low-quality food, over the perceived difference in treatment people experienced when flying business and economy class, to the difficulty of redeeming frequent flyer points (see the quote above left). Comments included:

"There's no point in QANTAS continuing to charge [as part of the ticket price] for the dry, tasteless offerings that were available on the last three flights I've taken with them. Maybe if it was a user-pays system and flyers had the option of paying or going without food, QANTAS might be forced to improve."

"The last time I flew with QANTAS I was lucky enough to travel in business class, and I received good service. Otherwise in economy I've had both OK and less than ordinary service."

"QANTAS treats economy-class passengers with contempt while business class is pampered. I often travel business for work, economy for other purposes and would rather have a uniform service. QANTAS doesn't understand the Australian culture, where there's not a 'business class' and an 'economy class' group of passengers. We use different classes depending on our needs, and expect to be treated with respect whatever we choose on a particular day."

When we spoke to QANTAS about our readers' concerns regarding the downmarket quality of the food served, we were told its inflight service was updated last August and now includes a hot dinner served on most flights departing between 6 pm and 8 pm and a "selection of gourmet snacks" on other flights.

On the topic of different treatment for business and economy class passengers, QANTAS spokesperson Lloyd Quartermaine confirmed business and economy class were different products (with different menus and seats), but pointed out QANTAS itself hadn't had any such complaints. "Our staff are trained to serve all classes: business, first and economy. It's the same people who do the work," he said.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

"There's a lot of hype about cheap airfares; however, they're very limited in my experience. I found it interesting that the five people who caught similar flights to mine all paid different fares. It seems only the lucky or very educated manage to secure better deals."

For each flight, airlines have a number of different fares available for economy-class travel. Unfortunately you can't find out how many of each fare are allocated per flight, as it's regarded as 'commercial-in-confidence'. But the difference in price between these fares can be substantial.

The survey

In February this year we invited over 5000 CHOICE and CHOICE Online subscribers to take part in an online survey if they'd flown with one of the four major domestic airlines in the previous 12 months. Just over 500 returned completed questionnaires. Thanks to all of you. We asked respondents to:

- Rate the major domestic airlines (JETSTAR, QANTAS, REGIONAL EXPRESS (REX) and VIRGIN BLUE) — see Table 1 for the results.
- Rate individual aspects of their most recent flight: comfort, service, punctuality, etc — see Table 2 for results. We've only printed ratings for JETSTAR, QANTAS and VIRGIN BLUE, as REX had insufficient responses. Although 44 of our respondents had flown with REX in the past year, only 11 had chosen it for their most recent flight.

In both tables the number in brackets after each airline's name is the number of people who reported on it.

The majority of respondents were 35 and over; 59% were men. Around four in 10 lived in either Sydney or Melbourne, and the trip between these cities was the most common route flown. Almost two thirds had flown for private reasons, one third were business trips (more for QANTAS). Around two thirds of trips (fewer for QANTAS) were booked over the internet.

Table 1. Survey respondents' overall rating (%) based on their experience over the previous 12 months

REGIONAL EXPRESS (REX) (44)	71
VIRGIN BLUE (276)	68
QANTAS (373)	67
JETSTAR (106)	47

Table 2. Satisfaction with individual aspects of respondents' last flight

Airline (in alphabetical order)	Jetstar (43)	Qantas (271)	Virgin Blue (166)
Convenience of flight (time / day, %)	62	71	75
Check-in procedure (%)	54	75	80
Punctual departure (%)	60	67	74
Seat location (%)	38	67	74
Seat comfort (%)	48	58	63
Legroom (%)	34	52	56
Food (%)	39 (A)	52	55 (A)
Inflight service (%)	49 (A)	60	69 (A)
Entertainment (%)	25 (A)	54 (A)	49 (A)
Cleanliness (%)	64	69	75
Toilet facilities (%)	59 (A)	61 (A)	67 (A)
Punctual arrival (%)	65	69	75
Baggage handling (%)	62	69	76
Value for money (%)	64	60	82

(A) Not all respondents rated this aspect, probably because not everyone bought food, used an entertainment option or visited the toilet during the flight.

For example, for one Saturday morning flight from Sydney to Melbourne, there was a \$278 difference between the cheapest and most expensive QANTAS online economy fares (Red e-Deal, Super Saver, Flexi Saver and Fully Flexible) when we checked online a few weeks ahead of the flight date. Flying VIRGIN BLUE, the difference between its four fares (Sale Fare, Flexi Saver, Blue Saver, Blue Plus) was \$190. JETSTAR had a \$154 fare difference between its JetSaver and JetFlex fares. (For an indication of the actual fare prices, see *The benefits of competition*, right.)

Money-saving tips include:

- If you know well in advance when you need to travel, book ahead — the earlier you book, the more likely you'll get one of the cheap fares allocated for that flight. However, check the airline's policy on changing or cancelling your flight if you're in any doubt about your ability to stick to a particular flight day or time. Cheap fares in particular can have stringent conditions attached, such as prohibiting any flight changes or imposing high fees for changing flight details.
- Be flexible — flying outside the peak hours when business people fly gives you a better chance of getting a cheaper fare.
- If you're online, use the internet to book the flight — all three airlines have cheaper online fares. The fare differences discussed above are for online fares.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

If you have reason to complain and can't resolve the issue with the airline concerned, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission may be in a stronger position to help you sort out the problem than your state's fair trading or consumer affairs office, as the airlines are based nationally. But if it's a travel agency you're at loggerheads with, contact the fair trading agency in your state, or the Australian Federation of Travel Agents, if the agency is a member.

The benefits of competition

To get an idea of the price differences between the three major domestic carriers, we checked, on the airlines' websites, the prices for a flight from Sydney to Melbourne, leaving on a Friday early afternoon, and returning to Sydney the following Monday afternoon — as if booking a long weekend away. We inquired on 8 March, just over four weeks ahead of the would-be departure day on 8 April 2005.

To fly with JETSTAR, we could have bought online fares advertised for \$69 to Melbourne and \$45 for the flight back. But as you probably know, these prices *don't* include surcharges, fees and taxes, which can increase the fare price considerably — in fact, from \$114 to \$173 per person for the return trip, which includes around \$30 per flight in extras. With VIRGIN BLUE, the cheapest fares available would have cost us \$218 per person (\$99 one way and \$59 the other, plus charges) and with QANTAS, \$227.87 per person all inclusive (\$83 each way plus charges).

A saving of just over \$50 between the three airlines' cheapest available fares for the trip, though you might do better if you can book further in advance. And for faster fare comparisons, try www.farehunter.com.au, which helps you find the lowest adult fares on QANTAS, VIRGIN BLUE and JETSTAR.

For an update on airfare pricing that arrived just before we went to press, see page 4.

GETTY

Sudan 1 in Australia?

A recent large food recall in the UK highlights the importance of traceability of foods and their ingredients.

You might have heard about it: hundreds of foods were recalled due to the presence of an illegal food additive, Sudan 1. It's a red dye, and is also banned in Australia because of its possible carcinogenic effect. In the UK it was traced to a batch of chilli powder used in the manufacture of Worcestershire sauce. This sauce was then used as an ingredient in over 400 products from a range of companies, resulting in the massive recall.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has advised that Walkers Worcester Sauce Flavoured Chips, found in some retail outlets in Australia that specialise in British foods, has been withdrawn from sale. We're told it's unlikely any other affected products will be found in Australia, mainly because those recalled in the UK were mostly fresh or chilled foods.

FSANZ co-ordinated a survey in 2004 to test chilli and paprika powders for Sudan 1 and found no contaminated products, although the sample size was relatively small.

If the products hadn't been traceable, who'd have thought Worcestershire sauce would be used as an ingredient in so many foods?



GOOD NEWS FOR MUSHROOM LOVERS

If you're already a mushroom lover, a new study from the University of Illinois in the US will have you reaching for more.

While we've known for a while that mushrooms are good for you, surprisingly the make-up of the carbohydrate component of mushrooms, including fibre, has until now been hard to measure.

The study found that the six mushroom varieties studied (enoki, shiitake, maitake, white button, crimini and portabella) are rich in total dietary fibre, as well as the soluble fibres chitin and beta-glucan, which are both especially heart-healthy. Pass the funghi...



Tea tastes

A takeaway espresso coffee may be the latest fashion accessory, but for many, nothing beats the lure of a good cup of tea.

These days you'll find more than just black tea on the supermarket shelf. The main difference between the teas is the degree to which they're fermented — here's a quick guide to some of the more common teas you might find.

- **Black tea** — like the majority of tea, it's made from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant. The leaves are rolled, fermented and dried to enhance the flavour. Names such as Darjeeling and Assam refer to their place of origin.
- **Green tea** — the leaves are not fermented but withered, steamed, rolled and dried. It's the lack of oxidation or fermentation that's said to give green tea the edge in the health stakes over black tea, as more antioxidants are preserved.
- **Brown tea** — also called oolong. The leaves are only partially fermented, left long and in their whole state and bruised and oxidised to a brown colour.
- **Scented tea** — this includes varieties such as Earl Grey, and is made by adding natural oils or spices, or flower petals such as jasmine, to black, green or oolong tea.
- **Herbal teas** — not from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, so not regarded as true teas, they can be composed of a single ingredient or a blend of flowers, fruits, herbs and spices. Examples include peppermint and chamomile.

Magic little PILLS?

Multivitamins are big business, but do they really give you what you need?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Multivitamin/mineral supplements can be useful for some people, though changing your diet to a healthier mix of foods is generally agreed to be a better way of improving or maintaining your health.

■ If you want to take a multivitamin to supplement your diet, check our best-value recommendations on page 16, or pick one from the table that has a combination of the vitamins and minerals you think you're lacking.

■ Believe it or not, multivitamins are a complementary medicine and may interfere with the absorption or function of prescription medicines, so tell your doctor you're taking one, or planning to.

Do you try to insure your health by using complementary medicine? You're in good company if you do. Around half the Australian population uses at least one form of it a year, most commonly through popping a multivitamin/mineral pill.

When we asked CHOICE readers in a quick e-poll why they took them, of the over 900 responses we received by March 2005:

- 32% told us it was out of habit.
- 23% told us it was for health and wellbeing.
- 14% said it was because they didn't think they were getting enough vitamins and minerals from their diets.

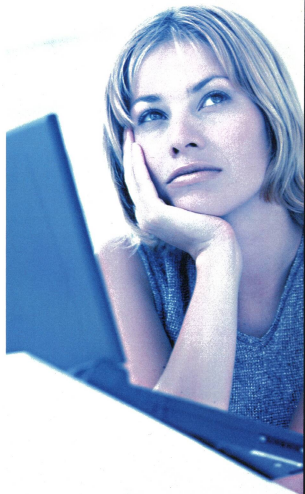
But the popularity of the first response suggests a lot of us don't think about why we take them very much. And the big question is: do we really need to?

DO YOU REALLY NEED TO TAKE A MULTIVITAMIN?

The short answer is 'not if you have a good diet'. In fact research makes it clear that a balanced diet is still the best way to get your vitamins and minerals, and studies show that diets high in whole grains, vegetables and fruit reduce the risk of cancers and other diseases.

A good diet also has several big advantages over supplements. For example:

- Whole foods are complex, containing not only the major nutrients but also a wide variety of vitamins, minerals and other micronutrients.
- Whole foods provide dietary fibre, which is important for digestion and has a role in preventing cancer, diabetes and heart disease.
- Whole foods contain other substances, called phytochemicals, which may also protect us against cancer, heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure (also see *Antioxidants*, far right).
- Whole foods usually contain vitamins and minerals



in different forms — for example, vitamin E occurs in nature in eight different forms — but supplements usually contain just one. The different forms may be absorbed better or not as well by the body (this is known as their bioavailability), and absorption may depend on other things in the food too. Improving your diet to include a variety of food sources gives your body a much better chance of absorbing enough of a vitamin in all the available forms.

However, there's also a case for some people taking supplements:

- Many adults — and particularly those who are elderly, ill or alcohol-dependent — don't have an adequate diet and so can be at risk of vitamin deficiency. For example, a national nutrition survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that most Australian women over 40 were eating less zinc and calcium than they needed.
- One trial involving elderly people showed that taking a multivitamin/multimineral supplement reduced the number of days of illness due to infections by half.
- Women who are pregnant, likely to become pregnant or who are breastfeeding may benefit from a multivitamin. The most important vitamin here is folate — eating more than 400 micrograms (μg) a day has been shown to reduce neural tube defects like



PHOTO LIBRARY

spina bifida in the developing fetus. Pregnant and breastfeeding women also need more of other nutrients, particularly iron and calcium. But pregnant women should avoid multis high in vitamin A, as this vitamin has been linked to an increased risk of birth defects. It's probably worth looking for a multivitamin especially formulated for pregnancy, but talk to your doctor about it first.

■ Research also shows that multivitamins may lower the risk of coronary heart disease, colon cancer and breast cancer, particularly among regular consumers of alcohol.

In fact in 2002, researchers from Harvard who'd undertaken a review of multivitamin studies concluded that it would be prudent for all adults to take a daily multivitamin.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SUPPLEMENT

If you do decide to take a multivitamin, the question is, with dozens of products on the market, how do you pick a good one? Well, for a start, you look for one that delivers a

daily dose that's close to the recommended dietary intake (RDI) of the vitamins and minerals you need — bearing in mind that these are only *supplements*, and you'd hopefully be getting a decent proportion of the RDI of most of them from your diet.

For our analysis we checked the labels of the leading multivitamins available from supermarkets, chemists and alternative health practitioners (general multivitamins, plus those formulated for men or women), looking for ones with reasonable doses of key vitamins and minerals. We based our ratings on whether they provide at least 75% of the RDI.

In the case of vitamin A, which only has a small margin of safety regarding its accumulation in the body, we also made sure that they weren't giving you too big a dose (see *What your body can and can't store*, page 18). Vitamin E is also stored in the body, but at present there are conflicting reports from studies on high doses. Long-term effects are unknown.

Then we compared which multivitamins offer good doses for a reasonable price (see *Best value*, page 16).

CONFUSING LABELS

Sorting out what's good value is no mean feat — the labels are confusing. Vitamins are listed under their vitamin name on some bottles (vitamin B₂) but under

their chemical name (riboflavin) on others. With quantities, some companies list the weight of the ingredient (which could be a compound), while others say what the vitamin or mineral equivalent of that ingredient is.

To add to the difficulty, different brands use different compounds to provide the same basic supplement. For example, calcium is variously derived from calcium phosphate, pantothenate, ascorbate, carbonate or citrate, from calcium hydrogen phosphate or as amino acid chelate, any one of which may appear on the bottle.

In short, if you're standing in a shop trying to decide between a couple of different supplements, you have almost no way of being sure you're really comparing apples with apples. In terms of labelling, we'd like to see manufacturers begin to address this by at least also listing vitamin and mineral values according to the percentage of the appropriate RDI in each dose. Our table shows the RDI for men and women and which supplements provide a decent dose of each ingredient.

WHAT WE FOUND

The good news is that, according to their labels, most of the multivitamin supplements we looked at do provide at least 75% of the RDI of important vitamins and minerals.

However, there are significant exceptions. No supplement we looked at, for instance, comes close to providing the RDI for calcium, and almost none the RDI for iron. Zinc levels are also low in most. If you're considering taking a multivitamin because you're concerned you're not getting enough of any of these micronutrients, look at changing your diet to get more of it from food (see *Important vitamins and minerals*, page 18), or consider taking a specific supplement that just contains that element.

ANTIOXIDANTS

Some vitamins, such as A, C and E, are antioxidants, which help prevent cell damage in the body. Oxidative cell damage is caused when 'free radicals' attack cells in the body. This type of attack is called oxidation: it harms cells and, among other things, may weaken the immune system. Free radicals are formed in the body as by-products when the body converts oxygen into energy, and by environmental causes. Antioxidants prevent oxidation by getting rid of free radicals before damage occurs. Fruits and vegetables are notable sources of antioxidants.

A recent Danish study looked at whether fruit and veg or a vitamin supplement was more effective, by comparing three groups of people: one on a fruit and veg diet, one taking supplements and one taking a placebo.

It found that both the fruit-and-veg and supplement groups had less cell damage than the placebo group, but the fruit-and-veg eaters fared best of all, with significantly less damage than those in the supplement group.

TOP TIP

Don't judge a multivitamin's potency by its vitamin C levels — it's cheap and easy to manufacture and most multis are loaded up with plenty of it.

In order to stand out from the crowd, manufacturers are also 'value-adding' trace doses of other elements and herbs. We didn't assess the significance of any of these for two reasons. First, they're mostly in such minute doses that they're unlikely to have a significant effect. Second, there's not much rigorous clinical evidence to support many of them having a beneficial effect on your health.

On the whole, taking multivitamins is generally considered 'safe'. As always, though, you need to discuss any supplement you're taking with your doctor to double-check that it won't interfere with any other medication.

CHOICE'S VERDICT

There's evidence that multivitamin/mineral supplements can be beneficial for some people, particularly if your general diet is inadequate, though they can't replace the benefits of changing your diet to a healthier mix.

If you do decide to take one, we found paying more doesn't necessarily buy you better base levels of essential vitamins and minerals. So we calculated good-value multis from our table that have decent doses of vitamins and minerals (See *Best value*, below).

Some companies market supplements with slightly different formulations for men and women, while others just have one general multivitamin. Differences might be, for example, that a women's multi contains more iron (because it's a mineral premenopausal women should keep an eye on), or that vitamin A is in a form that's safer for pregnant women (see *Important vitamins and minerals*).

Multivitamins (in points order)

PLURAVIT Men

BLACKMORES Women's Vitality Multi

CENTRUM Complete from A to Zinc

NATURE'S WAY Women's Energy Mega Multi-Vitamin

BLACKMORES Men's Performance Multi

BLACKMORES Sustained release Multi Vitamin & Minerals

HEALTHIERIES Men's Multi High Potency

HERRON All-in-One Mega Multivitamins & Minerals

NATURAL NUTRITION Mega Potency Men's Multi

NATURAL NUTRITION Mega Potency Women's Multi

NATURE'S WAY Men's Energy Mega Multi-Vitamin

NUTRIMEDICINE Multi Biocomplex

PLURAVIT Women

SWISSE Men's Ultivite

SWISSE Women's Ultivite

CENOVIS Men's Multi

CENOVIS Multivitamin and Minerals

METAGENICS Multigenics

PLURAVIT Multi

SUPRADYN Effervescent Essential Vitamins, Minerals, Micro Elements

CENOVIS Women's Multi

NATURE'S OWN Daily Multi Essentials

HEALTHIERIES Women's Multi

MYADEC Multivitamins and Minerals

Recommended dietary intake (RDI) (A)

BEST VALUE

These are multivitamins that contain the most vitamins and minerals at a level of 75% or more of the daily recommended dietary intake (RDI), and are also a reasonable price. Several products in the table were awarded the same points for their contents, but cost more. Just make sure the one you choose contains the particular vitamins or minerals you're interested in (such as iron for premenopausal women) in reasonable amounts. Whichever you go for, shop around — we've quoted recommended retail but prices can and do vary.

FOR MEN

	Cost for 30 days (\$)
PLURAVIT Men*	7.30
CENTRUM Complete from A to Zinc	10.95
HEALTHIERIES Men's Multi High Potency	6.00
HERRON All-in-One Mega Multivitamins & Minerals	10.00
NATURE'S WAY Men's Energy Mega Multi-Vitamin	9.95

FOR WOMEN

CENTRUM Complete from A to Zinc	10.95
NATURE'S WAY Women's Energy Mega Multi-Vitamin	9.95
HERRON All-in-One Mega Multivitamins & Minerals	10.00
PLURAVIT Women	7.30

BLACKMORES Women's Vitality Multi is a top scorer for vitamin and mineral content but costs more (\$14.95/30 days).

* Pluravit Men also meets the 75% rule for women's RDIs for the vitamins and minerals it contains, but it doesn't contain any iron (so may not suit premenopausal women) and the vitamin A is retinol-based and so unsuitable if you're pregnant.



Points, men / women	Calcium (% RDI)	Iron (% RDI)*	Zinc (% RDI)	Iodine (% RDI)	Magnesium (% RDI)	Potassium (% RDI)	2 Vitamin A (% RDI)	Folate (% RDI)	Vitamin D (% DRI)**	3 Vitamin E (% DRI)**	Biotin (% DRI)**	Vitamin K (% DRI)**	Price (\$)/ quantity†	Cost for 30 days (\$)
/13			125	67/83	2/2		100 (D)	125	25	150/214	167	22	7.30/30	7.30
/12	6	72/42	83	80/100	21/25		33 (E)	150	50	413/590	167		24.95/50	14.95
/12	20	57/33	42	67/83	31/37	80	107 (D)+(E)	100	50	149/213	500	40	10.95/30	10.95
/12	13	72/42	63	60/75	31/37	4	133 (E)	200	50	413/590	167	42	9.95/30	9.95
/11	6		125	33/42	11/13			150		413/590	167		24.95/50	14.95
/11	2	72/42	48	33/42	2/2	18	100 (D)	200	50	413/590	333	6	12.75/31	12.35
/11	1	14/8	125	100/125	6/7	20	56 (E)	150	25	1000/1429			12.00/60	6.00
/11 (B)	18	144/84	34	132/166	24/28	20		100		172/246	66		10.00/60	10.00 (B)
/11	3	29/17	50	33/42	14/16	8	111 (E)	150	50	413/590	167		18.85/30	18.85
/11	5	72/42	42	43/54	16/19	4	111 (E)	200	50	413/590	167		18.10/30	18.10
/11	7		167	33/42	16/19	20	67 (E)	100	50	413/590	167		9.95/30	9.95
/11	2		83	27/33	4/5	44	67 (E)	200	25	830/1186	167	56	28.15/60	14.10
/11	13	107/63	50	67/83	16/19		67 (E)	125	25	100/143	100		7.30/30	7.30
/11	3	43/25	50	33/42	17/21	8	111 (E)	250	50	413/590	167		22.00/30	22.00
/11	5	70/41	42	33/42	15/17	4	111 (E)	250	50	413/590	167		22.00/30	22.00
/10	5		83		6/7	4	33 (E)	50	25	250/357	83		8.15/31	7.90
/10 (C)	1	72/42	13	97/121	11/13	10	50 (D)	100		100/143			8.95/100	2.70 (C)
/10		43/25	42	17/21	13/15	31	33 (E)	75	2.5	420/600	167		25.50/90	8.50
/10	3	36/21	13	100/125	1/1	10	40 (D)	125	50	100/143		9	6.30/30	6.30
/10	13	21/13	8		3/3			100		100/143	667		14.20/30	14.20
/9	15	72/42	42	7/8	19/22		33 (E)	125	50	336/480			8.15/31	7.90
/9	15	72/42	42	7/8	19/22		33 (E)	125	50	336/480			9.95/30	9.95
/9	3	72/42	50		6/7	20	33 (E)	150	25	1000/1429			12.00/60	6.00
/8	8	73/43	13	100/125	2/2	10		100		50/71			9.95/120	2.50
800 mg 7/12-16 mg 12 mg 150/120 µg 320/270 mg 50-140 mg 750 µg 200 µg 10 µg 10/7 mg 30-100 µg 90-120 µg														

B VITAMINS AND VITAMIN C NOT IN THE TABLE?

■ Vitamin B₁: All the multivitamins in the table contain more than 75% of the RDI (which is 1.1 mg for men/0.8 mg for women).

■ Vitamin B₂: All contain more than 75% of the RDI (1.7/1.2 mg).

■ Vitamin B₆: The RDI is 19/13 mg. **HEALTHIERIES Women's Multi** contains less than 75% of the RDI for men.

■ Vitamin B₁₂: There's no Australian RDI, so we used the US dietary reference intake (DRI), which is 5 mg. Only **MYADEC** contains less than 75% (it doesn't contain any).

■ Vitamin B₁₂: All contain more than 75% of the RDI (1.3-1.9/0.9-1.4 mg).

■ Vitamin B₁₂: Only **CENTRUM** contains less than 75% of the RDI (2 µg).

■ Vitamin C: All contain more than 75% of the RDI (40/30 mg).

In many cases the supplements contain as much as 20 or 30 times the RDI for some of these water-soluble vitamins. For why that's not a problem, see *What your body can and can't store*, page 18.

* If you eat a sufficiently iron-rich diet, don't supplement iron (see Important vitamins and minerals, page 18).

** There's no Australian RDI: the US dietary reference intake (DRI) is used.

† Prices are recommended retail.

(A) Where there's a range for RDI, the percentage is calculated for the lowest value.

(B) All are single daily doses except *Herron*, which is twice daily. The percentage of RDI, points and cost for 30 days are calculated for a daily dose of two.

(C) *Novos Multivitamins and Minerals* recommends one to two daily; we scored as one per day.

(D) Based on retinyl acetate or palmitate.

(E) Based on beta carotene.

Where two numbers are given in a column, separated by a slash, the first is the percentage of the RDI for men and the second for women.

1 Points, men/women

Each product was awarded one point for every vitamin and mineral in the table (including the B vitamins and C — see left) that it contains at a level of at least 75% of the recommended daily intake (RDI).

2 Vitamin A

The numbers in this column are vitamin A itself. When beta carotene is the source (footnote E), it's converted to vitamin A as needed by the body. The approximate ratio of beta carotene to vitamin A produced is 6:1, so we divided the amount in the supplement by six to give the approximate equivalent of vitamin A.

3 Vitamin E

Although only **MYADEC** contains less than 75% of the RDI for vitamin E, many of the other multivitamins contain a great deal more. Studies have produced conflicting results on the benefits or toxic effects of high levels of vitamin E.

Important vitamins and minerals

The following vitamins and minerals are the ones most people probably need to be concerned about if their diet isn't as good as it could be. Others, such as some minerals and B vitamins that multivitamin supplements also contain, are unlikely to be in short supply in most diets.

CALCIUM

Calcium supports the structure of bones and teeth and helps to regulate blood pressure, as well as being needed by muscles, blood vessels and hormones and for sending messages throughout the nervous system. Inadequate levels of calcium, as well as vitamin D, contribute to the development of osteoporosis and fractures, so it's a particularly important mineral for seniors, especially women.

However, you won't find calcium at a 100% RDI dose in a multivitamin — it's so bulky the pill would be too big to swallow. So if you want to increase your calcium intake, you're better off doing it in your diet or looking for a specific supplement.

Main food sources: Dairy products, fish with bones (especially salmon and sardines), nuts, legumes (beans, including baked beans, lentils), tofu (if it's made with calcium sulphate). It's also found in smaller amounts in broccoli and leafy greens.

IRON

Iron is essential for oxygen transportation in the body and a deficiency can result in fatigue, poor work performance and decreased immunity. Prior to menopause it's an important mineral for women to keep an eye on, and vegetarians and endurance athletes might benefit from a supplement. But most other adults get plenty of iron from their diet and don't need supplements — in fact too much iron can cause or mask other health problems.

Ferrous iron salts (ferrous fumarate, ferrous sulphate and ferrous gluconate) are the forms of iron supplements that the body can absorb best. Absorbing iron from non-meat sources like supplements is boosted by vitamin C, so take them with a glass of orange juice.

Main food sources: Iron comes in two forms — haem iron and non-haem iron. The haem form is absorbed more readily by the body: sources include liver, red meat and chicken, and fish to a lesser extent. Good sources for non-haem iron are nuts, legumes, apricots and whole grains.

ZINC

Zinc helps protect the body's immune system and is important, particularly for men, for the reproductive system. It's also thought useful for promoting wound healing.

Main food sources: Oysters and other seafood, meat, liver and eggs are the best sources. It's also found in nuts, legumes and whole grains.

VITAMIN A

An important antioxidant, vitamin A comes in two main ways: either as ready-to-go preformed vitamin A (such as retinol) found only in animal foods; or pro-vitamin A, which is turned into vitamin A in the body and is mainly found in plant foods (for example, beta carotene, which is most common). Pregnant women shouldn't take it in the retinol form, as this is linked to a risk of birth defects. Excessive retinol (over 1500 µg/day) has also been implicated in reduced bone density or increased hip fracture risk. Two

What's in a name?

Following are the chemical names for vitamins that can appear on supplements:

- Vitamin A: retinol, retinaldehyde, retinoic acid, retinyl acetate or palmitate, or beta carotene.
- Vitamin B₁: thiamin.
- Vitamin B₂: riboflavin.
- Vitamin B₃: niacin, nicotinamide, nicotinic acid.
- Vitamin B₅: calcium pantothenate, pantothenic acid.
- Vitamin B₆: pyridoxine, pyridoxal, pyridoxamine.
- Vitamin B₉: folic acid, folate, folacin.
- Vitamin B₁₂: cyanocobalamin, cobalamin.
- Vitamin C: ascorbic acid.
- Vitamin D: cholecalciferol.
- Vitamin E: alpha-tocopherol.
- Vitamin H: biotin (in fact it's generally called this rather than vitamin H).
- Vitamin K: phyloquinone.



studies have suggested that men who are smokers and take high-dose beta carotene supplements have an increased risk of lung cancer.

■ **Main food sources:** It's chiefly found in liver and cod liver oil; some is also in oily fish, eggs, milk, butter and cream. The body can also easily convert it from the beta carotene in dark green vegetables and orange and red fruits and vegetables. It's usually added to margarines.

VITAMINS B₆, B₁₂

Vitamin B₆ is needed to make haemoglobin to carry oxygen and also help to maintain normal blood sugar and serotonin levels. Vitamin B₁₂ is needed to make DNA. Along with folate, low levels of vitamins B₆ and B₁₂ are risk factors for cardiovascular heart disease, and can result in anaemia and neurological disturbances. Taking a supplement of B₆ may also reduce the severity of PMT and morning sickness.

■ **Main food sources:** For B₆, wheatgerm, fish, bananas, meat, legumes and nuts. And per milligram, Vegemite is one of the richest sources of B₆. For B₁₂, liver, kidney sardines, oysters, egg yolk, fish, meat, cheese and milk.

FOLATE (FOLIC ACID)

One of the B vitamins, folate (or its synthetic form, folic acid) is especially important for pregnant women (in fact for all women who might get pregnant) as it's been proven to help reduce the level of neural tube defects (like spina bifida) in the developing foetus. Low levels may also be a risk factor for cardiovascular heart disease and colon and breast cancer. Clinical trials are currently under way to determine whether folate supplementation can lower the risk of coronary heart disease.

■ **Main food sources:** Fresh green leafy vegetables, asparagus, organ meats, legumes, oranges, nuts and folate-fortified cereals.

VITAMIN C

We need to eat vitamin C on a regular basis, as humans are one of the few species of animal that can't make it. It's also one of the most important antioxidant substances in the body, maintains the body's connective tissue, and is essential for the formation of collagen, the major element of blood vessels, skin, tendons, cartilage and teeth.

Some studies suggest that taking vitamin C supplements long-term may help prevent heart disease. It may also play a role in cancer prevention. Any role vitamin C might have in the prevention and treatment of the common cold remains hotly debated, but a recent Cochrane Review analysis of 29 vitamin C studies concluded that it doesn't appear to prevent colds, but may have a modest role in reducing their duration and severity.

■ **Main food sources:** It's in many fruits and vegetables, the most concentrated sources being blackcurrants, red capsicum, guava, pawpaw, oranges and strawberries.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is made in the body by exposure to sunlight. Along with calcium, low levels of vitamin D contribute to the development of osteoporosis and fractures, so this is important for seniors, particularly women. There's no Australian RDI for vitamin D (because there's thought to be little danger of anyone not getting enough exposure to the sun). However, anyone who's housebound or not exposed to direct sunlight for at least one to two hours a week is recommended to take a supplement of 10 µg/day. Elderly people in particular should make sure their diet contains enough. Pregnant women shouldn't take large doses.

■ **Main sources:** Apart from exposure to sunlight, small amounts are also found in oily fish like herring, salmon, tuna and sardines, beef liver, fortified margarine, eggs and cod liver oil.

VITAMIN E

This is considered to be the most important and potent fat-soluble antioxidant. It's best known for its effects on the cardiovascular system and may have a role to play in preventing cardiovascular disease, though recent research suggests having enough in your diet is better than supplements. High-dose vitamin E supplements have also been tested in clinical trials for pain relief of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, with varying results.

■ **Main food sources:** Vegetable oils, particularly wheatgerm oil, nuts and seeds. It's also found in eggs, soya beans, and fruit and vegetables to a lesser extent.

What your body can and can't store

■ **Water-soluble vitamins**, including vitamin C, biotin and the seven B vitamins (see *What's in a name?*, far right) aren't stored in your body in significant amounts. Because surplus water-soluble vitamins are simply excreted in your urine, 'megadoses' of these are mostly a waste of money.

■ **Fat-soluble vitamins** (like A, D and E) that aren't immediately used by your body are stored in your body fat and liver. High doses over a long period are potentially toxic, even though studies of high-dose vitamin E have produced conflicting reports of possible benefits for some conditions (see right). And because vitamins E and K affect blood clotting, talk to your doctor before taking a supplement that contains either if you're also taking a blood thinner such as warfarin. Supplements of fat-soluble vitamins should be taken with a meal or your body won't properly absorb them.



A stroll in the park?

Most of the 'jogger' strollers we tested failed to live up to expectations.

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 10 three-wheel strollers ranging from \$320 to \$720.
- Four strollers failed to comply with safety standards, and could put your child at risk of injury.
- Four strollers failed our durability tests.

Judging by the number of three-wheel strollers you see out and about, they're more popular than ever. The perceived ability to go jogging with your child as well as pop to the shops is obviously appealing to many parents. Most three-wheelers look robust and able to tackle both city and off-the-beaten-track conditions, and they certainly make a fashion statement. But how versatile, easy to use and safe are they really?

Eleven parents roadtested 10 three-wheel strollers over two days, rating their ease of use and their manoeuvrability in a variety of situations. We then put the strollers through safety and durability tests based on the Australian standard (AS/NZS 2088:2000). The results are shown in the table, page 22.

Two strollers, the **SWALLOW** and the **MOUNTAIN BUGGY**, came out as clear favourites among our trialists, and passed the safety and durability tests to boot. (Interestingly, these were also the simplest in design, while most of the others were more bulky and fussy.) But we were disappointed to find that, if anything, the strollers overall were worse than the ones we last tested (see **CHOICE**, Jan/Feb 2004) — the disappointment heightened by the fact that these strollers were in a higher price bracket than those tested previously. In fact we wouldn't recommend

any of the following strollers, which we think have faults — most of them serious — with regard to durability, safety or both.

DURABILITY FAILURES

Given that some people do jog with their three-wheel strollers (see *Jog or stroll?*, page 22, for more), we modified the standard test so that the strollers were running at 10 km/h instead of 5 km/h on our 'rolling road' rig (which simulates the stroller being wheeled along a slightly bumpy road), for a maximum of 64 hours. Four models failed.

- The front wheel of the **BABYLOVE** and the **LOVE N CARE** broke off after 33 hours and five hours respectively (see the photos, page 22).
- A rivet joining the basket to the frame broke off the **BERTINI** after 33 hours.
- A rear wheel slid off the **STEELCRAFT**'s axle after 40 hours.

In case we were unlucky with the samples we'd purchased, we bought a second sample of each of the above four models and retested. The front wheel broke again on the **BABYLOVE** (after nine hours) and the **LOVE N CARE** (after 13 hours); and a different rivet (one joining the front of the seat to the frame) broke on the **BERTINI**.

The STEELCRAFT passed when retested, but we noticed that its wheel attachment clips were different from those on the first sample. Subsequent discussions with the manufacturer revealed that there are several clip designs on the market and it's unclear which is most widely distributed. While the manufacturer told us it's received no complaints about this type of failure from consumers, nor has the failure been observed in its own durability tests, we still think it's a cause for concern. In fact a complaint we recently received from a consumer about this exact failure supports our view.

SAFETY FAILURES

Four strollers failed the safety requirements of the standard.

- The LOVE N CARE's seat can be pulled away from the frame, so if a child leaned too far forward or sideways, the entire stroller could tip.

- A zip tab on both of our samples of the MACLAREN stroller can be detached and pose a choking hazard. The first sample also failed the requirements for security of locking devices. In addition, its 'easy to miss' brake design is a cause for concern (see 'Brakes' in *What to look for*, page 24, for details).

- The waist buckling and adjusting devices on the PHIL & TEDS stroller can slide along and off the strap too easily.

- The padding of the VALCO Rebel's bumper bar can be torn off easily in pieces that can pose a choking hazard. It can also trap an infant's head between the bumper bar and the seat, as well as between the folded canopy or the handlebar and the backrest when it's in a horizontal position.

Most disturbing of all was the injury potential of the VALCO's reversible and removable seat. There's no secondary locking mechanism for the seat release. If the single lever is released with a child in the stroller, the seat can tip backwards (or forwards if the seat is reversed) and fall out of the stroller, tipping the child onto the ground (see our photos, page 22). The lever can easily be inadvertently pressed by the carer or another child, who could be attracted by the red colour of the lever, and it requires only a little more pressure to operate than is stipulated as a minimum in the standard.

While this isn't a failure to the standard, we think it's a real safety hazard and brought it to the attention of the ACCC. It negotiated with VALCO, and as we were going to press we were advised that new models will have an additional lock on the seat release mechanism. If you have a current-model Rebel, VALCO has created a strap to be retrofitted to the seat section and chassis support bar. The company will advertise the availability of these straps in newspapers as soon as they arrive in Australia.

What to buy

These two models passed all our safety and durability tests and were also our trialists' favourites. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March/April 2005.

MOUNTAIN BUGGY URBAN SINGLE U1204-002

Price: \$718

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest stroller to carry (it folds down comparatively flat).
- Equal easiest to lock the front wheel to the non-swivel position.
- Multiple backrest positions.
- Five mesh pockets and one zipped pocket on the parcel tray.

BAD POINTS

- Fixed footrest.
- Crotch strap isn't adjustable.
- No suspension.
- No front bar.

Trialist comments:

"Easy to open, lightweight, folding is excellent..."

"Easy to fold and unfold."

Large storage area. Adjustable handles."



TAMARA GRAHAM

SWALLOW BEEMA Q

Price: \$399

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to carry groceries and get through doorways.
- Easy to lock the front wheel to the non-swivel position.
- Multiple backrest and footrest positions.
- Adjustable crotch strap.
- Removable and adjustable front bar.

BAD POINTS

- No suspension.

Trialist comments:

"A nice, basic stroller, without too many bells and whistles."

"Narrow — fits through all doors."



TAMARA GRAHAM

TEST: Three-wheel strollers

Brand / model (in order of safety test pass or failure, then user trial rating)	PERFORMANCE		6 FEATURES							
	3 Passed safety tests	4 User trial rating (%)	5 Passed durability tests	Harness shoulder-strap pads	Adjustable crotch strap	Backrest positions	Front bar	Adjustable footrest	Adjustable handle height	Window in canopy
1 WHAT TO BUY										
MOUNTAIN BUGGY Urban Single U1204-002	✓	65	✓			2 (D)			✓	✓
SWALLOW Beema Q	✓	65	✓		✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 THE REST										
BERTINI Ko-Ko 242-K	✓	55			✓	3	✓ (E)	✓		✓
STEELCRAFT Swivelrite Deluxe 36820	✓	55		✓	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
BABYLOVE BL3362VR Pioneer 2	✓	50		✓		5	✓ (E)	✓	✓	✓
CHILDCARE Trio-sport 013700-001 (A)	✓	45	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
VALCO Rebel N5316 ATS (B)		55	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
LOVE N CARE Xtrail BP9750		45		✓	✓	3	✓			✓
PHIL & TEDS E3 V2		40	✓	✓	✓ (C)	3	✓ (E)		✓ (F)	✓
MACLAREN Mac 3		35	✓			2 (D)			✓	✓



The front wheel broke off the Babylove and Love N Care strollers in our durability test.

SAFER STROLLERS

Baby product safety is vital, and CHOICE is concerned that the current standard is lacking in some areas. The following concerns raised by the results of our testing need to be addressed:

- A front wheel that breaks could have serious consequences, particularly if you were jogging with the stroller. Because three-wheel strollers are more likely to be used for this purpose, we think the standard should stipulate a higher speed for testing than it currently does.

- Strollers should have separate primary and secondary locking devices to prevent them from being inadvertently dismantled when a child's in them; this isn't currently covered by the standard.

CHOICE is calling for clauses that address these issues to be added to the standard.

JOG OR STROLL?

Strollers such as those we tested are commonly referred to as 'jogger' strollers, and the design — specifically the three wheels, the big tyres and the sporty look — all suggest rough terrain or higher-speed use. But in fact jogging or going over rough terrain with some of them might not be a wise idea.

When we checked with the manufacturers about using them in this way, some told us their product isn't described or designed for use as a jogger stroller. With others, using them for jogging was conditional. For example, the **STEELCRAFT**'s manufacturer told us the front wheel should be locked when jogging (but it recommends that you don't jog with a newborn in the stroller); the **VALCO**'s manufacturer said jogging isn't recommended until the baby can sit up (the implication being that it's fine to use the stroller that way once that's the case); and the user manuals of all the models except the **MACLAREN** and **SWALLOW** specify that the front wheel should be locked while jogging or going over rough terrain.

The Valco's mechanism to remove the reversible seat is operated just by this red lever, which requires little pressure to be triggered accidentally, or perhaps by an inquisitive older child. The sequence of events shown in the photos then happens within a second or two — far too fast for you to be able to intervene. See page 21 for a proposed fix.



Accessories Availability		SPECIFICATIONS												Price (\$)(††)
		Tyre pump*	Rain cover*	Leg cover*	Insect cover*	Removable liner*	Leash*	Weight (kg)**	Max child weight (kg)†	Upright dimensions (W x L, cm)	Folded dimensions (W x L, cm)	Warranty (months)	Origin	
Buggies	✓					✓	10.6	35	69 x 144	69 x 105	12	NZ	Mountain Buggy	718
	✓		✓		✓	✓	12.6 (J)	22	60 x 138	60 x 90	12	China	Babyco Direct	399
	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	13.4	17	62 x 141	62 x 89	12	China	IGC	359
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	15.6	20	74 x 136	74 x 91	12	China	Britax Childcare Products	399
		✓	✓		✓		14.3	20	71 x 143	71 x 85	12	China	BabyLove	349
	✓	✓	✓ (H)		✓	✓	12.4	17	72 x 140	72 x 96	12	China	C O White	320
	✓						17.1	20	66 x 137	66 x 97	12	China	Valiant Enterprises	550 (B)
		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11.8	30	68 x 131	68 x 96	12	China	Elcheikh International	449
			✓ (G)			✓	10.9	23	64 x 127	64 x 87	12	NZ	Phil & Teds Most Excellent Buggy Co.	549
	✓		✓	✓ (H)	✓	✓	12.2	ns	69 x 147	45 x 80	6	China	C O White	640

Some manufacturers just seem plain confused: **PHIL & TEDS** manufacturer told us it doesn't sell its stroller as a jogging stroller. But one of the accessories is a Race Seat ("Breathable, padded, contoured support for your little girl or boy racer. Start your engines!"). We're not sure how anything less than jogging could be considered racing.

And while the **BERTINI's** manufacturer told us it had "limited effectiveness" as a jogger stroller, its user manual instructs you to "Always use the parent safety strap when jogging" and "Always lock the front wheel when jogging". Reading this, you'd quite reasonably assume the stroller can be used for jogging.

Given the failures we saw on our rolling rig at higher speeds, it's certainly clear that three-wheel strollers aren't all cut out for jogging, despite their reputation. If you specifically want a stroller for this purpose, choose carefully (if you're buying now, go for the models in our *What to buy* list). And whether you're jogging or simply walking at higher speeds — or indeed over any rough terrain — always lock the front wheel to prevent it swivelling and potentially causing an accident.

* For models where these accessories aren't provided, they may be available as optional extras. Check the instructions, or ask the retailer. All models that come with a rain cover can be folded with it fitted.

** With all accessories supplied.

† As recommended by the manufacturer.

†† Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in March/April 2005 (December 2004 for the Love N Care).

ns Not stated.

- (A) A new model will be available from June 2005. It's identical in construction but has new fabric and is called Trilogy.
- (B) This model is being upgraded and the version we tested is to be discontinued, but you may still find it in stores. This is the price we paid in December 2004.
- (C) Two positions only, and the shorter is still very long.
- (D) Two main (essentially upright and horizontal), but further intermediate adjustments can be made to give multiple positions.
- (E) Not adjustable.
- (F) Two positions only.
- (G) Covers the back of the stroller only.
- (H) Zip on, as part of the removable liner.
- (I) This model is now available with aluminium wheel rims, bearing retainer plates and rear axles, giving it a lower weight of 11.8 kg.

1 What to buy

These strollers passed all our safety and durability tests, and got the best scores in our user trial.

2 The rest

These strollers failed safety and/or durability tests and/or received a low score in our user trial.

3 Passed safety tests

We tested all strollers to the Australian standard AS/NZS 2088:2000. For details of those that didn't pass all tests, see *Safety failures*, page 21, for details.

4 User trial rating

Trials pushed each stroller over a set course that included doorways, stairs, sloping footpaths, kerbs, grass and rough ground. They also folded and unfolded each model; tried the brakes; carried the folded strollers; put a shopping bag in the carry space; placed their children in the stroller and adjusted and secured the harness. They provided an overall rating for each stroller based on their experience. Each stroller was rated by at least 10 trialists.

5 Passed durability tests.

All strollers underwent our durability tests, which are based on the Australian standard. For model details of those that didn't pass all tests, see *Durability failures*, page 20, for details.

6 Features

See *What to look for*, page 24, for more on these.



What to look for

Before you buy, there are a few practical things to consider, including:

- **Car boot size:** Measure it to make sure the stroller fits without needing the wheels removed.
- **Folding and unfolding:** Try folding and erecting it in the shop and see if you can carry it comfortably.

Look for the following safety features (found on all the models tested, unless specified):

- **Brakes:** The effectiveness of the brakes and their engagement is vital. Look for rear brakes on both wheels that are foot-operated and linked, so the left and right brakes can be activated by a single lever rather than applied individually. Get an idea of how well they work by applying the brakes and then try to push the handle. Check that they actively lock into position.

The **MACLAREN** was the only model tested without linked rear brakes. It has two individual rear brakes that only engage when pressed firmly, with the brake mechanism precisely positioned. A gentle foot action doesn't always fully engage the brakes and park the stroller safely.

Foot-operated brakes mean you don't have to bend down, but make sure your feet fit under them easily.

- **Harness:** A five-point harness consisting of two shoulder straps (attached to the backrest at shoulder level), a waist strap and a crotch strap. The waist straps in particular should be securely linked to the stroller's frame, so that the child can't lean out and tilt the stroller.

Give the harness a tug to check that the seat doesn't pull away from the frame. The straps should be adjustable (allowing for growth) and the buckles easy to use (for you, but not your child). All but two models have an adjustable crotch strap (see the table for details).

- **Wheels:** Look for a front wheel that swivels to make manoeuvring easier, and that can be locked in the forward

direction when travelling at higher speeds or over rough terrain. Large wheels tend to be better on kerbs and stairs; pneumatic (inflatable) ones can puncture but generally give a comfier ride.

And check:

- Are there **protruding parts** that can hit your child's head or small parts that can detach easily and pose a choking risk?
- Are there **gaps** that could trap your or your child's fingers? (Look especially around the release and folding mechanism areas.)
- Are there **sharp edges or points** on any surfaces?
- Is there a **child-resistant** mechanism for locks?
- And is the stroller **stable** enough not to tip easily?

Other important features to consider before you buy (most strollers on test have all of them):

- **Backrest:** An adjustable upright backrest that can move to at least one semi-reclined position; some can be fully reclined (best for sleeping or babies under six months).
 - **Front bar:** A detachable bar that the child can hold onto when seated upright. It can also serve as a barrier. As it's usually not secure it shouldn't be used to lift the stroller.
 - **Footrest:** Reduces the likelihood of injury by the child's feet touching the ground or getting caught in the front wheel.
 - **Handle:** A handle that can be adjusted to a comfortable height to suit different users.
 - **Canopy:** A canopy that can be extended to provide shade or shelter. Some have a viewing window so when it's extended you can still see your child.
 - **Storage:** A basket or tray under the stroller for carrying things like nappies, baby food, clothes and your handbag. It shouldn't be loaded beyond its weight limit, usually around 5 kg, or the stroller may become unbalanced and therefore unsafe. Some models have a pouch behind the seat or other small pockets where you can keep small lightweight items.
- Other useful features that may not be provided as standard, but may be available as optional extras (check the table for model details) include:

- **Tyre pump:** A hand-operated pump for inflating pneumatic tyres.
- **Leg cover:** A bag-like attachment you can pull over the child's legs for protection against the weather.
- **Rain cover:** A clear plastic sheet you can drape over the stroller in wet weather.
- **Insect cover:** A mesh cloth to protect the child from insects and other bugs. The **STEELCRAFT** and **LOVE N CARE** both have this as standard.
- **Removable liner:** This provides additional comfort, and can also help support smaller babies (and then be removed when the child is bigger).
- **Leash:** A leash on the handlebar that straps to your wrist and can prevent the stroller from running away in case you lose your grip while moving at speed. (Note there is some concern that the leash can be a strangulation hazard if it becomes accessible to the child).



TAMARA COHEN

Thank you to all our trialists for giving two days of their time to try out the strollers for us, and for their patience with the models that didn't behave as well as they'd have liked.

4 YEAR INDEX

July 2001—June 2005

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

*Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, recalls or letters. For space reasons, the index generally does not include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and Recalls and Bans.

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Buon appetito!

When you're buying spaghetti you might as well choose the cheapest — we tested 26 brands and our Home Testers thought they were all OK.

Spaghetti is a favourite with many people. It's quick and convenient to cook, and there are many wonderful sauces to serve with it — so it's no surprise that in Australia each of us slurps our way through an average of nearly four kilograms of spaghetti a year.

But does it make any difference which brand you buy? Most supermarkets have many different brands, you can buy even more in delis, and we found prices ranging from less than 50 cents for 500 g to over \$5. So we put some of the most popular and widely available brands to the test.

THE VERDICT

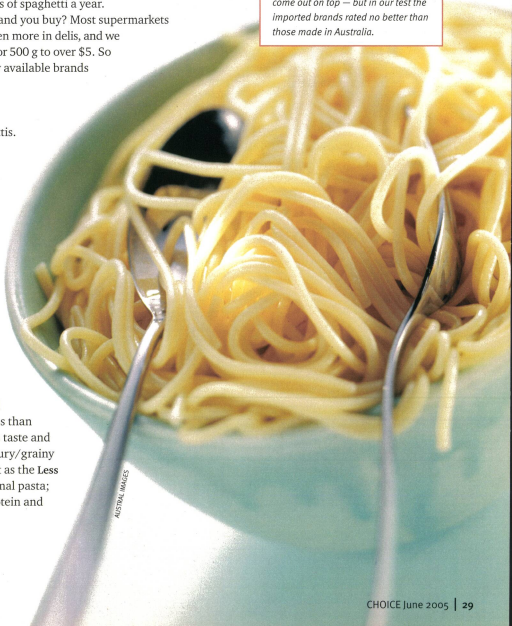
Our Home Testers quite liked all the spaghetti. Although we've ranked them by score in the table, the range of scores is too narrow for any brand to really stand out as being significantly ahead of the pack, although clearly the brands at the top were liked better than those at the bottom. So, bearing in mind that you'd never actually eat spaghetti without sauce, as our gallant Home Testers did (see *The taste test*, page 30), there's little to choose between them and you might as well buy the cheapest (**HOME BRAND** is only 49 cents for 500 g and rated only 4% below the top-scoring **VETTA No 1**, which costs more than twice as much).

VETTA Less Carbs No 1 was the only brand that stood out as being liked significantly less than average. The testers were less happy with its taste and texture; some of them commented on its floury/grainy texture and wholemeal-like appearance. But as the **Less Carbs** name suggests, it's different from normal pasta; the manufacturer told us it added wheat protein and fibre to replace some of the starch.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ CHOICE Home Testers tasted 26 brands of spaghetti widely available in supermarkets and delis — and thought they were all more or less OK. No brands stood out as exceptional, so you might as well buy the cheapest that's close to the top of the table (page 31).

■ With about 900 years of spaghetti-making tradition behind them, you might think that Italian brands would come out on top — but in our test the imported brands rated no better than those made in Australia.



SPAGHETTI BY NUMBERS

Many brands of spaghetti include a number with the product name on the label — along the lines of ‘BORGIA Spaghetti No 7’ (and there are plenty of real examples in the table).

You might think these numbers refer to the thickness of the spaghetti (much like the gauge numbers for wire or the diameters of screws). But they don't really mean anything to consumers. They're just the series numbers of the pasta products in that manufacturer's range, and each manufacturer numbers differently. The numbers are as meaningless (and unhelpful) to consumers as the model numbers used by most other manufacturers.

If you're on a low-carb diet, though, it does seem rather desperate to look for a low-carb version of something that's as definitively carbohydrate as spaghetti.

SUPERMARKET OR DELI?

You might have thought you'd get better spaghetti by going for the more expensive brands often sold in delis. On average we paid \$2.07 per 500 g for the deli brands compared with \$1.17 for the brands from supermarkets. But our Home Testers didn't like the deli brands any better.

AUSSIE OR ITALIAN?

Italy's the home of pasta, so they must make it better — right? Until about 15 years ago, this was definitely true. Most Australian pasta was made from the same wheat as that used to make bread, and wasn't of

good quality for that reason. Good pasta's made from durum wheat (see *It doesn't grow on trees*, right) and in Italy it's the only wheat that's allowed for making pasta. Pasta made from bread wheat doesn't have the same colour and texture, and it's much easier to overcook it and make it mushy.

But most Australian pasta is now also made from durum wheat (all the ones in our test are), so perhaps it's not surprising our Home Testers rated the Australian-made brands equal to those imported from Italy.

FRESH IS BETTER?

Fresh pasta is now widely available and growing in popularity. However, you're unlikely to see fresh spaghetti — fettuccine's more common, and various pasta shapes filled with meat, vegetable or cheese fillings (such as tortellini and ravioli).

Is it better? No, it's just different and, contrary to rumour, Italians eat lots of dried pasta. Fresh can taste slightly different, particularly if you make it yourself (see *It doesn't grow on trees*); it cooks much faster and (unless you therefore accidentally cook it for too long) is easier to cook to a perfect *al dente*. In the end it comes down to personal preference, perhaps depending on the style of pasta you're using, such as the filled types noted above.

Fresh pasta's too perishable for us to have included it in this test. It's also more expensive, but definitely worth a try if you really love pasta.

**CHOICE
HOME
TESTER**

The taste test

Thank you to the 669 Home Testers who took part in this trial. All of them are

pasta eaters at least a few times a month, and all buy pasta from a supermarket. Some (11%) said they also buy pasta from a deli or specialty shop; a few (6%) are keen enough to occasionally make their own fresh pasta.

We sent each of them two brands of spaghetti; each brand was tasted about 50 times. So that the trialists couldn't recognise the brands, we sent the samples wrapped in plastic and identified only by a code number. They tasted the spaghetti without sauce.

As we couldn't test all the brands of spaghetti available in Australia, we chose 26 widely available ones. And we included only one type of spaghetti per brand (unless a brand also had spaghetti labelled 'organic' or 'low in carbohydrates'). Not all of them are available nationwide, but you should be able to find most of them in major supermarkets and delis.



It doesn't grow on trees

In one of the most celebrated April Fool's Day hoaxes of all time, the BBC once convinced a significant proportion of the British population that spaghetti grows on trees (the program showed women plucking strands of spaghetti from the trees and laying them in the sun to dry). Many viewers even called up wanting to know how they could grow their own. (They were told: "Place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best.")

In reality, spaghetti's made from durum wheat. It's a different species from bread wheat and has a comparatively high protein content that gives pasta its characteristic texture. It also has a yellow pigment that gives it the attractive golden colour.

The grain's milled more coarsely than for bread flour, making a product called semolina. The semolina's made into dough with water and the dough's then forced through small holes to make spaghetti. The spaghetti's finally dried in a stream of warm air. (Other pasta shapes are made using different-shaped holes, or stamped from flat, rolled sheets of dough.)

If you make pasta at home, you probably use ordinary flour mixed with eggs. The egg yolks give it the yellow colour of pasta made from durum wheat and the egg white proteins make the pasta cohesive and firm when you cook it.

Brand	1 Overall score (%)	Origin	2 Price paid per 500 g (\$)
VETTA No 1	71	Australia	1.38
MARKETTA No 1	69	Australia	0.98
COLES ORGANIC Italian Pasta	68	Italy	1.59
BALDUCCI No 4	67	Australia	0.99
DELVERDE No 4 (A)	67	Italy	1.99
GUACCI No 19 (A)	67	Italy	0.99
HOME BRAND	67	Australia	0.49
NANDA	67	Australia	0.85
BI-LO	66	Australia	0.79
DE CECCO No 12 (A)	66	Italy	1.99
LORI Pasta Puglia No 3	66	Italy	1.09
PASTA AURORA No 7	66	Italy	0.98
ZAFARELLI No 4	66	Australia	0.98
BARILLA No 5	65	Italy	1.95
SAN REMO Organic Bronzato Style	65	Italy	2.19
DI MARTINO (A)	64	Italy	1.09
NO FRILLS	64	Australia	0.64
GARAFALO No 9 (A)	62	Italy	1.49
COLES No 1	61	Australia	0.80
DIVELLA Ristorante No 8	61	Italy	0.99
HAIOS (ILIOS) No 6 (A)	61	Greece	1.49
REMANO	60	Australia	0.59
L'ABRUZZESE Organic Pasta	59	Australia	5.47
SAN REMO	58	Australia	1.55
CORVALONI Thick	57	Australia	0.49
VETTA Less-Carbs No 1	54	Australia	2.83

(A) You'll find it in delis rather than supermarkets.

1 Overall score

This is based on the tasters' overall impression of the spaghetti. They were also asked to rate the spaghetti specifically for flavour, texture and thickness, but none of these factors showed much variance from the overall score.

2 Price per 500 g

As the packet sizes vary, we calculated the price per 500 g for ease of comparison (based on what we paid in January 2005).



How much is your car to repair?

It could cost many thousands more than the cheapest models.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Low-speed crash tests are designed to indicate repair costs, not occupant safety.
- The repair bills for the 46 cars assessed range from less than \$3000 to more than \$8000.

The repair bill from a low-speed bingle can be almost one third of a new car's purchase price, and there are big differences between models in each size category.

For example, the same crash can cause damage worth less than \$3000 (SMART Fourtwo Coupé, MAZDA 6 Classic), around \$6000 (several models), or even more than \$8000 (RENAULT Scenic Expression — the highest repair bill of all).

THE TEST

Each year, NRMA Insurance crashes a pendulum device into a number of top-selling cars, simulating a crash into a barrier at 15 km/h, or into the rear of another car at about 30 km/h.

NRMA experts then assess the damage and repair costs. Information for models that were tested before and are still available unchanged is updated using current parts and labour costs. New models and significantly different new versions of already tested models are crashed and the damage repair then priced.

The aim of the tests:

- The insurer uses the results to determine premiums for the tested models.
- It hopes to encourage manufacturers to keep spare parts costs down, as they can make up more than 80% of the total repair bill.

■ They reveal design weaknesses manufacturers can aim to rectify the next time they design a new version of the model.

THE TREND

Increasing spare parts prices are the main reason the majority of assessed models show an increase in repair costs compared to the year before.

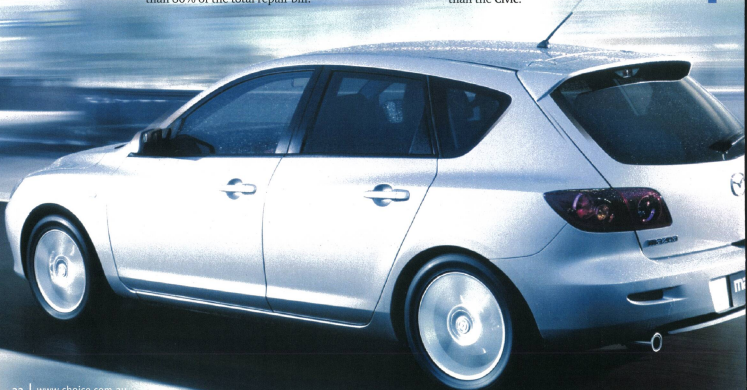
The worst-affected models were the MITSUBISHI Lancer ES, HONDA Accord Euro (compared to the previous Accord model) and SMART Fourtwo Coupé (although it still has the lowest repair bill of all). The HYUNDAI Elantra, PEUGEOT 307 XS, FORD Falcon XT MkII and RENAULT Scenic Expression also showed significant price increases.

But there was also good news. The new FORD Fiesta LX and MAZDA 3 Maxx Sport are a lot cheaper to repair than the models they replaced (Ka2 and 323, respectively).

HIGH-TECH HYBRIDS

For the first time, the two electric-petrol hybrid models available in Australia (HONDA Civic Hybrid and TOYOTA Prius II) were included in the program.

Despite their high-tech equipment, their repair bills are comparable to conventional models. However, the Prius is significantly cheaper to repair than the Civic.



Make / model (ranked by total repair costs within categories)	Total repair costs (\$)*	Labour (\$)*	Parts (\$)*	Total as % of purchase price	Purchase price (\$)*	1 Change compared to 2003
SMALL						
SMART Fourtwo Coupé, 0.7 L, automatic, 2-door hatch	2814	554	2260	13.5	20,900	XXX
MAZDA 2 Neo Power Pack, 1.5 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	3072	841	2231	15.9	19,310	✓
HYUNDAI Accent, 1.6 L, manual, 3-door hatch	3101	1335	1766	20.7	14,990	X
HYUNDAI Getz GL, 1.5 L, manual, 3-door hatch	3258	1170	2088	23.3	13,990	X
HOLDEN Barina, 1.4 L, manual, 3-door hatch	3390	709	2681	22.6	14,990	✓✓
FORD Fiesta LX, 1.6 L, manual, 3-door hatch (A)	3670	674	2997	22.3	16,490	✓✓✓
KIA Rio, 1.5 L, manual, 5-door hatch	4103	1838	2265	27.4	14,990	✓✓
DAIHATSU Sirion, 1.0 L, manual, 5-door hatch	4322	1511	2811	30.9	13,990	✓
TOYOTA Echo, 1.3 L, manual, 3-door hatch	4453	1872	2582	29.7	14,990	✓
HONDA Jazz Vti, 1.5 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	5965	1842	4123	26.8	22,290	X
SMALL-MEDIUM						
SUBARU Impreza RS, 2.5 L, manual, 4-door sedan	3827	1396	2431	12.8	29,990	X
SUBARU Impreza WRX, 2.0 L turbo, manual, 4-door sedan	4001	1406	2596	9.4	42,490	X
MAZDA 3 Maxx Sport, 2.0 L, automatic, 4-door sedan (B)	4295	1162	3134	15.1	28,455	✓✓✓
HOLDEN Astra CD, 1.8 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	4645	1179	3465	19.4	23,990	✓✓
HYUNDAI Elantra, 2.0 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	4715	1900	2815	22.5	20,980	XX
PEUGEOT 307 XS, 1.6 L, manual, 5-door hatch	4804	676	4127	18.5	25,990	XX
TOYOTA Corolla Seta Ascent, 1.8 L, manual, 5-door hatch	4839	1516	3324	23.6	20,490	X
FORD Focus CL, 2.0 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	5668	1131	4537	23.0	24,660	X
HONDA Civic Vt, 1.7 L, automatic, 5-door hatch	6458	2052	4406	23.1	27,950	X
NISSAN Pulsar ST, 1.8 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	6573	2199	4374	29.9	21,990	X
MITSUBISHI Lancer ES, 2.0 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	7143	1587	5556	32.5	21,990	XXX
MEDIUM						
MAZDA 6 Classic, 2.3 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	2884	832	2052	8.3	34,685	✓
TOYOTA Camry Altise, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	4057	1578	2479	14.0	29,000	X
HOLDEN Vectra CD, 2.2 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	4181	1002	3179	12.3	33,990	✓
SUBARU Liberty 2.5i, 2.5 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	4737	1410	3327	12.6	37,490	X
HONDA Accord Euro Luxury, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door sedan (C)	6140	1739	4402	14.3	42,800	XXX
HYBRIDS						
TOYOTA Prius II, 1.5 L, 5-door hatch	4408	1360	3048	11.6	37,990	Not tested in 2003
HONDA Civic Hybrid, 1.3 L, 4-door sedan	7438	2229	5209	24.8	29,990	Not tested in 2003
LARGE						
HOLDEN Commodore Executive, 3.6 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	3320	1609	1711	9.4	35,410	X
MITSUBISHI Magna ES, 3.5 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	3385	1714	1671	9.6	35,110	✓
FORD Falcon XT MKII, 4.0 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	3555	1089	2467	10.1	35,175	XX
TOYOTA Avalon Gxi, 3.0 L, automatic, 4-door sedan	4368	1917	2452	14.1	30,990	✓✓
RECREATIONAL 4WDs						
SUBARU Forester X, 2.5 L, manual, 4-door wagon	3779	1389	2391	12.0	31,490	X
SUZUKI Grand Vitara Sports, 2.5 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	3928	2011	1917	11.9	32,890	✓
SUBARU Outback 2.5i, 2.5 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	4641	1488	3153	11.5	40,490	X
DAIHATSU Terios DX, 1.3 L, manual, 4-door wagon	5176	1619	3557	27.4	18,900	X
HOLDEN Cruze, 1.5 L, manual, 4-door wagon	5578	1992	3586	29.4	18,990	Not tested in 2003
NISSAN X-Trail ST, 2.5 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	6029	2073	3956	17.7	33,990	✓
MITSUBISHI Outlander XLS, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	7256	1980	5277	19.9	36,390	✓
HONDA CR-V Sport, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	7429	1395	6034	19.2	38,749	✓
TOYOTA RAV4 Cruiser, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	7690	1362	6328	19.9	38,680	X
PEOPLE MOVERS						
KIA Carnival LS, 2.5 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	4059	1718	2341	12.5	32,500	✓
HOLDEN Zafira, 2.2 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	4813	1220	3593	13.8	34,890	X
TOYOTA Avenis Verso GLX, 2.4 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	5529	1769	3760	12.8	43,300	X
HYUNDAI Trajet, 2.7 L V6, automatic, 4-door wagon	7470	2226	5244	22.6	32,990	X
RENAULT Scenic Expression, 2.0 L, automatic, 4-door wagon	8100	1969	6131	26.1	30,990	XX

(A) Ford Ka² used for comparison.

(B) Mazda 323 used for comparison.

(C) Previous-model Accord used for comparison.

* Prices as at 30 November 2004 (including 10% GST and rounded to the nearest dollar), as quoted by manufacturers or distributors. All purchase prices include air conditioning and power steering where available. Air conditioning is regarded as standard equipment on some vehicles that have had extended marketing deals.

Source: NRMA Insurance, 2005.

1 Change compared to 2003
This shows how repair costs for each model have changed since the 2003 test.

XXX Increased by more than 20%

XX Increased by 10–20%

X Increased by up to 10%

✓ Unchanged or decreased by less than 10%

✓✓ Decreased by 10–20%

✓✓✓ Decreased by more than 20%

MEET YOUR NEW MOBILE

Test results for 45 GSM models.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Most of the tested models do their main job — taking and making phone calls — well. So you'll probably choose based on features, price or what's available with your call plan.

■ More than three quarters of Australians over 13 own a mobile phone.

This is an update of our test in CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005. The general comments on test results we made then are still valid: battery capacity is generally keeping up well with increasing power demands for new features like a large colour display; basic everyday functions are easy on most of the tested models; but some models can still deal with a weak signal better than others (see *Sensitivity score* in the table, page 36).

Here we're reporting on 28 new phones and 17 models from the Jan/Feb article that are still available.

For more detail, check out the Jan/Feb issue of the magazine, or see the article on www.choiceextra.com.au, which (for a limited time) will also give you free access to our interactive 'Pick-a-phone' tool.

CAMERAS IMPROVING SLOWLY

A camera is standard on almost all new mobile phone models, but picture quality is improving only slowly. There are now quite a few cameras with a resolution of more than one megapixel (most new dedicated digital cameras have three or more megapixels). However, other parts of the system don't seem to have kept up, and more pixels don't necessarily result in better pictures, as our tests show (see page 38).

A brief poll of visitors to CHOICE Online showed that:

- About 50% use the camera in their phone hardly ever or only now and then. Only 8% use it regularly.
- 28% have a phone without a camera and aren't interested in getting one; 12% have a phone without a camera, but wish they had one.

The relatively poor picture quality achieved by most current camera phones may well be one reason for these results.

WHAT TO BUY

NOKIA 6170	\$639
NOKIA 7270	\$979
SAMSUNG SGH-D500	\$999

These three phones were the overall top scorers and should perform satisfactorily all-round.

For photos:

SONY ERICSSON S700i Price not provided

If your top priority is taking and sending reasonable photos, the above model rated pretty well overall and its built-in camera scored best for picture quality. However, it has other strengths and weaknesses — see its *Profile*, right, for details.

Profiles

The top three models in the *What to buy* list have the same score and are profiled in alphabetical order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2005.

NOKIA 6170

Price: \$639

A solid performer across most aspects (best in the test for picking up a weak signal), and packed with features and functions. However, its camera's picture quality is only average, its battery takes almost three hours to recharge, and it's comparatively heavy.

NOKIA 7270

Price: \$979

Very similar to the **NOKIA 6170**: a solid performer across most aspects, and packed with features and functions. However, its camera's picture quality is only average, and it's comparatively heavy.

SAMSUNG SGH-D500

Price: \$999

A solid performer across most aspects (best in the test for everyday use, such as the ease of answering a call, storing a number into memory and dialling a number stored in memory), and has Bluetooth. However, its camera's picture quality is only average.

FOR PHOTOS:

SONY ERICSSON 5700i

Price: Not provided

The most versatile model in the test, with a very good range of features and functions, but also one of the heavier and bigger phones. One of the most difficult to use for everyday functions.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

You're likely to be happy with how most of the other tested models work if they have the features and functions you want. Which model you choose will depend on your budget and needs — and probably on which are available with the phone plan you want.

If a particular performance aspect, a specific feature or small size is essential for you, a model further down the table than the top performers, but which doesn't have a major weakness, may be the one for you. For example:

- If you use your phone a lot in areas with poor network coverage, some models further down the list scored well for **sensitivity** if the **NOKIA 6170** doesn't suit you.
- If long **talk time** is important to you, you can upgrade to a higher-capacity battery with most models. The model with the longest talk time using the standard battery was the **SONY ERICSSON P910i**, but it's also the heaviest model in the test.
- If you want to use your phone as a **mobile office**, the **MOTOROLA E1000**, **NOKIA 6630** and **SONY ERICSSON P910i** and **Z1010** are the pick of the bunch.

	PERFORMANCE										
Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Battery score (%)	3 Sensitivity score (%)	4 Everyday use score (%)	4 Ergonomics score (%)	4 SMS score	5 Sound quality score (%)	6 Picture quality score (%)	7 Versatility score (%)	8 Portability score (%)	9 Durability score (%)
NOKIA 6170	68	63	80	76	63	74	62	50	73	59	75
NOKIA 7270	68	65	77	81	61	72	60	54	77	54	77
SAMSUNG SGH-D500	68	62	75	89	59	70	67	54	68	66	65
NOKIA 7260	67	69	76	73	70	67	57	47	73	72	62
SONY ERICSSON P910i	67	73	68	62	53	85	66	64	85	25	68
NOKIA 3220	66	70	77	75	62	69	57	39	67	74	55
ALCATEL OT756	65	71	75	71	56	61	62	44	66	70	62
NOKIA 5140	65	64	75	73	71	68	52	41	74	64	71
NOKIA 6630	64	73	68	56	56	67	51	67	82	38	58
SONY ERICSSON S700i	64	66	69	44	57	68	56	75	91	37	67
SONY ERICSSON Z1010	64	78	62	59	45	65	52	60	85	30	78
LG T5100	63	78	69	81	54	61	51	47	62	41	68 (D)
MOTOROLA E398	63	80	67	67	57	54	46	62	62	56	64
MOTOROLA E1000	63	57	75	71	54	68	55	58	80	38	66
NOKIA 6610i	63	68	63	74	67	70	56	34	60	77	61
SAMSUNG SGH-E330	63	52	75	83	62	62	64	43	50	75	74
SAMSUNG SGH-X460	63	52	73	83	56	62	64	na	34	82	78
SIEMENS CX70	63	49	72	65	69	76	61	51	63	70	61
SIEMENS S65	63	46	72	70	70	70	52	66	73	62	61
SONY ERICSSON F500i	63	66	70	53	65	65	57	48	71	70	66
SONY ERICSSON K500i	63	66	70	53	58	66	57	48	71	71	66
NOKIA 2300	62	80	75	67	55	53	48	na	25	70	64
NOKIA N-Gage QD	62	81	75	60	39	61	45	na	67	26	73
MOTOROLA V3	61	55	70	73	46	68	53	52	64	67	59 (D)
MOTOROLA V620	61	61	67	71	46	66	52	51	62	52	74
NOKIA 2650	61	66	70	57	51	67	49	na	37	69	78
NOKIA 7610	61	58	77	58	47	59	56	63	73	48	53
PANASONIC EB-X700	61	43	72	65	51	63	52	61	77	56	84
SHARP GX15 (A)	61	57	59	68	59	64	60	52	59	74	64
SIEMENS SL65	61	43	70	67	55	71	64	50	65	71	64
SONY ERICSSON K700i	61	62	69	38	63	69	47	56	80	67	67
MOTOROLA V550	60	61	64	67	47	66	49	52	69	52	67
SAGEM myV-55	60	76	66	56	45	63	54	43	49	65	61
NEC 338	59	64	65	48	50	75	47	32	64	58	89
NOKIA 6260	59	49	74	47	51	58	47	60	84	49	78
PANASONIC EB-X500	59	62	78	72	53	55	45	40	53	67	55 (D)
SIEMENS M65	59	45	60	74	68	70	54	50	62	60	66
MOTOROLA V220	58	69	65	79	47	41	45	39	44	67	72
NOKIA 2600	58	66	73	55	57	62	52	na	28	69	53
NOKIA 7280	57	56	79	40	40	52	36	50	69	78	70
MOTOROLA C650 (B)	56	56	70	68	49	46	60	38	47	69	52
PANASONIC EB-X300	55	58	64	77	51	35	41	37	48	73	62
SIEMENS C65	55	39	66	62	63	67	52	37	57	71	53
MOTOROLA C115 (C)	54	81	66	60	52	27	52	na	1	69	61
SONY ERICSSON T105	50	57	62	40	56	35	50	na	13	84	67

See page 38 for footnotes and notes explaining the numbered columns.

		11 FEATURES									SPECIFICATIONS					
10 Time in use (h)	Charge time (min)	Tri-band	Hands-free	Voice dial	Voice record	Talking partner record	IR port	Email	Bluetooth	Antenna	Weight (g)*	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)**	12 Camera resolution (megapixels)	Digital zoom	13 Claimed SAR value (W/kg)	Price (\$)!
5.1	171	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	123	88 x 47 x 23	0.31	✓	0.34	639
5.2	76	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	124	90 x 47 x 25	0.31	✓	0.46	979
6.0	120	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	Internal	99	93 x 47 x 25	1.31	✓	0.31	999
4.9	79	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	94	105 x 45 x 19	0.31		0.51	479
10.1	152	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Internal	159	115 x 59 x 27	0.31		0.88	ns
4.9	177	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	90	104 x 49 x 18	0.31		0.78	439
6.5	199	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	93	107 x 46 x 21	0.31	✓	0.50	199
5.0	77	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Internal	101	107 x 47 x 23	0.31		0.77	479
5.5	94	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Internal	128	110 x 60 x 24	1.23	✓	0.83	999
5.8	130	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	132	108 x 49 x 27	1.23	✓	0.73	ns
8.1	137		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	146	99 x 54 x 29	0.31		1.41	ns
7.7	132		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	126	98 x 48 x 27	1.23	✓	0.59	649
6.7	240	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	Internal	109	108 x 47 x 21	0.31	✓	1.01	299
4.3	176	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	Internal	139	114 x 52 x 23	1.23	✓	0.88	899
4.2	76	✓	✓				✓			Internal	86	106 x 45 x 19	0.10		0.73	319
5.9	139		✓		✓	✓				Internal	88	87 x 47 x 24	0.31	✓	0.90	599
5.1	124									Internal	77	85 x 44 x 23	na	na	0.85	189
3.9	120	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		Internal	92	108 x 47 x 20	0.31	✓	0.67	399
3.8	138	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	Internal	103	109 x 48 x 21	1.23	✓	0.48	829
6.1	115	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	88	103 x 46 x 21	1.23	✓	0.82	ns
6.1	115	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	86	103 x 46 x 21	1.23	✓	0.53	ns
5.3	210	✓								Internal	92	106 x 46 x 21	na	na	0.86	149
6.0	99		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Internal	144	68 x 118 x 24	na	na	0.57	389
4.8	118	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Internal	97	98 x 53 x 15	0.31	✓	0.62	999
5.5	224	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fixed	126	89 x 49 x 25	0.31	✓	0.65	549
4.8	180									Internal	99	85 x 46 x 24	na	na	0.54	229
3.9	87	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	Internal	119	109 x 53 x 20	1.00	✓	0.54	899
4.4	120	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Fixed	108	96 x 49 x 25	0.31	✓	0.48	ns
5.7	117	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	Internal	84	105 x 45 x 19	0.31	✓	0.84	349
3.7	107	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	Internal	98	90 x 49 x 22	0.31	✓	0.58	799
5.5	108	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	95	99 x 47 x 22	1.23	✓	0.48	ns
5.9	225	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fixed	122	90 x 49 x 26	0.31	✓	0.81	429
7.6	158	✓	✓				✓	✓		Internal	99	107 x 46 x 19	0.31	✓	0.58	179
4.9	185		✓		✓	✓		✓		Fixed	114	94 x 47 x 24	0.10	✓	0.36	ns
3.8	77	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal	130	102 x 50 x 23	0.17	✓	0.72	619
5.6	97		✓		✓	✓				Internal	96	85 x 47 x 25	0.31	✓	0.67	ns
3.7	115	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		Internal	105	110 x 51 x 22	0.31	✓	0.88	649
6.5	232	✓	✓	✓						Fixed	103	83 x 45 x 25	0.31	✓	0.90	249
5.6	198		✓							Internal	93	108 x 46 x 21	na	na	0.80	189
4.8	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Internal	84	31 x 116 x 21	0.31	✓	0.83	1199
5.4	219	✓	✓	✓						Internal	93	102 x 43 x 20	0.31	✓	0.87	249
5.6	127	✓	✓							Internal	85	93 x 50 x 22	0.31	✓	0.86	ns
3.0	94	✓	✓		✓		✓			Internal	87	105 x 47 x 19	0.10	✓	0.73	349
8.4	211									Internal	84	101 x 48 x 22	na	na	0.88	99
3.9	108									Internal	74	100 x 44 x 18	na	na	0.84	ns

* Including battery and SIM card.

** With lid closed where applicable.

† Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2005. Some manufacturers declined to give us an RRP.

na Not applicable — the phone has no camera.

ns Not stated.

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

(B) According to the manufacturer, this model has now been replaced by the C651, which has the same specifications.

(C) According to the manufacturer, this model has now been replaced by the C116, which has the same specifications.

(D) Defective after the tumble test.

Features and functions

Features in the table (see page 37):

- **Tri-band models** can be used on the 1900 MHz frequency band used in the US and Canada as well as on the two bands available in Australia (see *dual band*, below) — useful if you're planning to use your mobile there.
- **Hands-free use:** Models with this feature have a speakerphone that allows you to make a call without holding the handset, such as when you're driving.
- **Voice dialling:** Allows you to record a word (such as the name of a person) together with a phone number, and to dial the number by saying that word.
- If your handset has **voice recording**, you can also record voice messages and send them on, and record voice memos and reminders. Some models also let you record your **talk partner** (if they give their permission).
- If you want to use your phone as a mobile office, look for a model with an **IR (infrared) port** for easy data transfer to your computer; **email capability**; and **Bluetooth** — wireless radio technology that allows a range of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, mobile phone car kits, computers and PDAs, to easily communicate with each other over a range up to 10 metres.

ALL THE TESTED MODELS HAVE:

- The option of **vibration alert** instead of ringing;

keypad locking; **dual band** (both the 900 and 1800 MHz bands used in Australia); **SMS**; an **alarm**; and **WAP**, which is a slower version of GPRS (see below), except the **MOTOROLA C115**, **NOKIA 2300** and **2600**.

- **Colour display**, except the **MOTOROLA C115**, **NOKIA 2300** and **SONY ERICSSON T105**.
- **Polyphonic ring tones.** You can download additional ones with all but the **MOTOROLA C115** and **SONY ERICSSON T105**.
- **Phonebook memory** in the phone in addition to the one on the SIM card (except the **MOTOROLA C115**), so you can save more contacts.
- **SMS memory** in the phone in addition to that on the SIM card (except the **MOTOROLA C115**, **E998** and **V220**), so you can save more messages.
- **Calendar** with reminder function (except the **MOTOROLA C115** and **NOKIA 2300**)
- **GPRS** (except the **MOTOROLA C115**, **NOKIA 2300** and **2600** and **SONY ERICSSON T105**): This stands for 'general packet radio service' — it allows you access to web-like applications available over the mobile network. You can use your mobile to receive and display information on certain topics (such as the weather, sports results or the share market), buy goods or book tickets, and send and receive email. You're charged for the amount of information you download, not the time you're connected.

Notes to the table (pages 36–37)

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on a combination of the following scores:

- Battery: 17.5%
- Sensitivity: 14%
- Everyday use: 10.5%
- Ergonomics: 5.25%
- SMS: 10%
- Sound quality: 10.5%
- Picture quality: 10%
- Versatility: 10%
- Portability: 7%
- Durability: 5.25%

Columns 2–9

See CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on that issue under 'Mobile phones' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores. (If a phone doesn't have a camera, the score for picture quality isn't zero; instead the weighting for the picture quality score is distributed evenly across the other scores.)

10 Time in use

We continuously drained the batteries under various conditions in a network simulator. The time in this column is the average of all the tested scenarios.

11 Features

See *Features and functions*, above left, for an explanation of these.

12 Camera resolution

As a comparison, most new dedicated digital cameras have a resolution of at least three megapixels.

13 Claimed SAR value

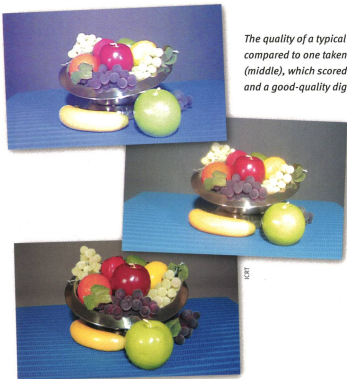
The specific absorption rate of the phone (the amount of energy per kilogram of body weight that's absorbed by the body when you're using the phone), as claimed by the manufacturer. There's currently no scientific evidence that mobile phone radiation is harmful (see CHOICE, June 2004). However, if you're concerned, you may want to choose a model with a lower SAR

The quality of a typical camera phone photo (top), compared to one taken with the Sony Ericsson S700i (middle), which scored highest for picture quality, and a good-quality digital camera (bottom).

ROAMING UPDATE

GSM is also widely used overseas, so chances are you can take your mobile with you and use it when you travel — just check with your provider how much it'll cost you. CDMA phones connected to Telstra can now be used in New Zealand, but not elsewhere overseas. Orange CDMA doesn't offer international roaming.

For more on GSM and CDMA see the Jan/Feb 2005 issue or go to that article in the index of www.choiceextra.com.au.



THE CHOICE GUIDE TO SAFER PEST CONTROL

3rd edition

Paul Rogers

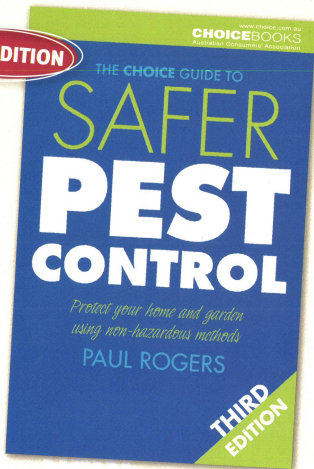
Cockroaches, fleas, mosquitoes, flies and termites — every household has to deal with these annoying, damaging and sometimes disease-carrying house and garden pests. But in attempting to control them, how can you ensure that either you, or the pest control company you employ, use methods that are safe for your family, pets and the local environment, as well as being effective and reliable?

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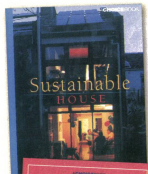
Paul Rogers has worked as an environmental consultant in hazardous substances at all levels of government, and is a licensed pest management professional.

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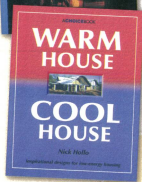
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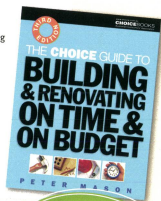
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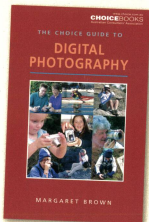
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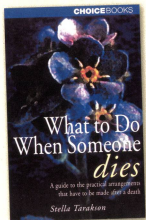
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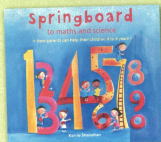
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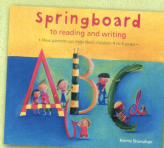


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Winter warmth

Prices for some convection heaters
have dropped dramatically.
Do they still do their job?

We tested six new electric convection heaters from \$50 to \$299 with a maximum heating capacity of 2000 W, making them suitable for a bedroom or small living area — depending on where you live and how well insulated your home is.

We're also reporting on three models still available from our test first published in CHOICE, April 2003.

Some of the new models are very cheap, comparable to fan heaters. However, this comes at a cost — manufacturers have cut back on features compared to what was widely available two years ago: only two of the new models have a fan (which helps distribute the heat evenly in a room), and some have only one heat setting.

NOT SO HOT

A number of models couldn't raise the temperature of our test room by 10°C in two hours — that's not very satisfactory. While this was true for all the models without a fan two years ago, the **DIMPLEX** and **SUNAIR** models in this test have a fan and still didn't manage it.

If you're in doubt about the ability of a 2000 W convection heater to keep you warm enough in your part of the world, look for a 2400 W model (which is the highest heating output a portable electric heater is allowed to have), preferably

with a fan, as it will help to distribute the heat in a room more evenly.

SAFETY

■ All the tested models have a thermal cutout to switch them off if they overheat (for example, when they fall over, or in our towel test — see note 4, page 43). However, the **IXL**, **DELONGHI BBH100** and **MISTRAL** didn't switch off when tilted on their backs, indicating that their thermal cutouts don't work properly.

■ All surface temperatures were within the allowed limits.

■ Most models passed electrical safety tests. However, the first sample of the **DELONGHI HN20-2** failed the 'cord anchorage' electrical safety test, which requires the electrical cord to remain firmly attached when it's pulled with a certain force. In this case, the cord pulled out of the heater and live wires were left dangling.

We bought a second sample, which passed the test, so the first may have been a one-off. However, to be on the safe side when buying this model, check that you can only see the black cord where it joins the housing (not the individual brown and blue wires), and that it's firmly attached.

■ The **IXL** and **SUNAIR** sustained damage to their plastic panels in the towel test (see note 4), but the towel didn't catch fire.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ We've tested a number of new 2000 W convection heaters, and also report on the models still available from our April 2003 test.

■ This type of heater has become a lot cheaper, but many are disappointing. Manufacturers have cut back on useful features and most of the models tested didn't manage to heat our test room very effectively.

WHAT TO BUY

The best model from this test plus the best still available from our previous test (published April 2003) are profiled. Prices are recommended retail, provided by manufacturers in April/May 2005.

MISTRAL MCVH2000

Price: Not provided. According to the manufacturer, this model has been discontinued; while some stock is still available, it may be difficult to find. In April 2003 its recommended retail price was \$80.

GOOD POINTS

- Good thermostat — keeps the temperature very stable.

BAD POINTS

- Continued to cycle on and off when tilted on its back (its thermal cutout didn't switch it off).

EW2 2571

Price: \$50

GOOD POINTS

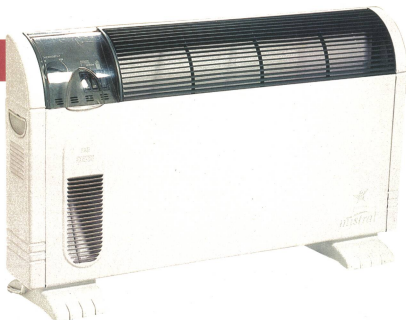
- Fastest heat-up times.
- Good thermostat — keeps the temperature very stable.

BAD POINTS

- No fan — heats the room relatively unevenly.
- Only one heat setting.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST

- The **DELONGHI HR720** and **HN20-2** were slower at heating up our test room than the top models.
- The bottom five models in the table didn't manage to raise the temperature in the test room by 10°C within the test's two-hour time limit.



Brand / model (in rank order)

MISTRAL MCVH2000 (C)

EW2 2571

DELONGHI HR720

DELONGHI HN20-2

DIMPLEX EC534 (B)

SUNAIR CVS2000F (C)

IXL 72405 (D)

DELONGHI BBH100 (E)

SUNBEAM HE3800

Missing brands?

■ As explained in *CHOICE Cuts*, April 2005, we tested 2000 W convection heaters in March this year to try and include the latest models — but this means the magazine can't publish the results till now. They've been available free to subscribers on www.choiceextra.com.au since early May: click on 'Convection heaters' in the index.

■ Despite our efforts we missed out on new models from **KAMBROOK** (KCH350) and **MISTRAL** (MCVH10), which were released in late April — too late to be included in our test.

■ **OMEGA** told us it won't be selling any convection heaters this season.

■ **HELLER** and **HOTPOINT** have 2400 W convection models, but no 2000 W ones, as tested.

Performance					6 Features		6 Specifications						
1 Overall score (%)	2 Heating score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Safety tests	5 Fan noise	Frost watch	Heat settings	Cord length (m)	Dimensions (L x H x D, mm)*	Weight (kg)†	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
71	75	62	(G)	Quieter	✓	3	2.5	670 x 410 x 100	4.8	2	China	Mistral	ns
70	74	60	Pass	No fan	✓	1	2.7	580 x 445 x 120	3.8	2	UK	Hagemeyer	50
64	65	63	Pass	No fan	✓	2	2.2	580 x 530 x 110	4.4	2	China	Delonghi	149
61	62	60	(H)	No fan	✓	3	1.5	630 x 430 x 100	3.0	2	Italy	Delonghi	69
57	55 (F)	60	Pass	Noisier	✓	2	2.7	560 x 425 x 120	3.9	2	UK	Hagemeyer	70
57	56 (F)	60	(J)	Quieter	✓	3	1.8	700 x 460 x 110	4.0	1	China	GAF Control	50
55	49 (F)	70	(G) (J)	No fan		2	2.0	635 x 660 x 145	7.8	2	China	Backwell IXL	299
52	54 (F)	48	(G)	No fan	✓	3	2.6	1200 x 280 x 100	4.8	2	Italy	Delonghi	149
50	45 (F)	63	Pass	No fan		1	2.7	715 x 660 x 60	7.7	3	China	Sunbeam	249

* Rounded to the nearest 5 mm and 100 g.

** Recommended retail according to manufacturer information in April/May 2005.

ns Not stated.

(A) First reported on in CHOICE, April 2003; according to the manufacturer it's now been discontinued, and while some stock is still available it may be difficult to find. It's also available with a timer (MCVH2007).

(B) Also available without a fan (EC533, \$60).

(C) Also available without a fan (CVS2000, \$40) and with a timer (CVS2000T, \$60).

(D) First reported on in CHOICE, April 2003; also available with a timer (72410, \$329).

(E) First reported on in CHOICE, April 2003.

(F) Didn't manage to raise the temperature in our test room by 10°C within two hours.

(G) Kept heating when on its side.

(H) See Safety, page 41, for details.

(J) Sustained some damage (melted plastic parts) in the towel test.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the heating (70%) and ease of use (30%) scores.

2 Heating score

The heaters were assessed in a thermal comfort lab — a room measuring 4.9 m by 3.5 m with an insulated ceiling (height 2.4 m), which sits inside a temperature-controlled outer room that provides a constant outside temperature. We tested the following:

- **Heating speed:** How long does the heater take to raise the room temperature by 5°C and 10°C?
- **Heat distribution:** How evenly does the heater heat the room?
- **Thermostat performance:** How well does the heater's thermostat maintain a selected room temperature?

3 Ease of use score

We assessed the following:

- Use of controls.
- Visibility and clarity of markings.
- Ease of cleaning.

■ Cord storage.

■ Mobility.

4 Safety tests

■ **Stability or tilt test:** This requires the heater not to tip over when tilted to an angle of 15°. We also placed the heaters on their sides and checked whether a tilt switch or thermal cutout switched them off.

■ **Towel test:** A towel is draped over the heater while it's turned to its highest setting. This simulates what could happen if a towel or clothing were accidentally dropped or left on it. Ideally, a thermal cutout should protect the heater from being damaged, and the towel from catching fire.

■ **Electrical safety tests:** We carried out a number of tests to the Australian standard.

■ **Surface temperature test:** We measured whether the heaters comply with Australian standard requirements for maximum temperatures of different heater parts.

5 Fan noise

Without the fan operating, convection heaters are very quiet. We measured the fan noise 1 m in front of the heater and 1 m up.

While a noisier model may impact on a conversation or TV sound, you're likely to use the fan only for short periods at a time — to quickly heat up your room initially, and then perhaps for a few minutes every now and then to break up the layering of air and distribute the heat. So we don't think noise is a big problem with this type of heater.

6 Features and specifications

■ **Thermostat:** This maintains a desired average room temperature (as long as it's within the heater's capacity), and should have a control that's easy to read and set. All the tested models have one.

■ A fan usually allows for much quicker and more even heat distribution. You'll generally then switch it off and let the heater's thermostat maintain the desired room temperature.

■ **Frost watch:** This is claimed to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. We didn't test this feature but it's a good idea for colder climates.

■ **Heat settings:** The more settings, the more flexibility you have to cope with different heating requirements.

■ **A thermal cutout** is meant to prevent the heater from overheating. All the tested models have one.

■ A tilt switch is intended to turn the heater off if it tips over.

■ **Cord length:** Look for a long cord if you want to be able to move the heater around, as they're not supposed to be used with an extension cord — it may get hot and pose a fire hazard.

WANT MORE INFO?

For more heating information, check the following articles (all listed under 'Heaters' in the index) on www.choiceextra.com.au:



■ **Your heating options** tell you the pros and cons of gas and electricity for heating, and which heater type is most suitable for which heating task.

■ **Electric personal and room heaters** looks at the different types of electric heater.

■ Our interactive **electric heater database** is available for a limited time too. It contains information on prices, features and specifications (but no test results) for over 200 models, as provided by manufacturers. You can search it for the best model for your needs.

Suckers for steam

Getting rid of steam and smells in the kitchen.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ You can pay \$1000 or more for a rangehood, but we found some good ones among the lower-priced models tested that sell for less than \$350.

■ Our tests confirmed that ducting a rangehood to the outside gives better steam extraction than using one in recirculating mode.

■ Fixed rangehoods outperformed their retractable counterparts in recirculating mode.

If you love a home-cooked curry but don't want your house to smell like an Indian bazaar for days, you need a good rangehood. These sometimes ugly, sometimes trendy-looking contraptions come in different styles and can range in price from a couple of hundred to well over a thousand dollars.

Our test included 16 popular rangehoods from the lower price range. They're all around 60 cm wide, include fixed and retractable styles, and can be used in both ducted and recirculating mode. Ten made it into the *What to buy* list.

But before you hit the shops, consider the issues below, especially if you haven't bought a rangehood before.

WHICH TYPE?

■ **Fixed** rangehoods cover most of the hotplate area. All the fixed models in our test worked better than the retractable ones in recirculating mode, and all but two in ducted mode, because they come out further and cover more of the cooking area. They also have a considerably larger filter area. On the downside, a fixed rangehood always sticks out and may get in the way, especially if it's at head height.

■ **Retractable** rangehoods have a frame that holds the section you pull out to cover part of the hotplate area, and the fan and light come on and go off as you pull the section out and push it back in. Retractable models are generally less efficient at steam removal because of their smaller steam collection area; this was especially the case in recirculating mode. The advantage: once you finish cooking, you can push it out of sight and out of the way.

■ **Canopy** rangehoods (rather like a freestanding flue in your kitchen) are becoming popular, but they can be very expensive compared with the other systems available.

WHICH MODE?

All the rangehoods we tested can be installed in either ducted or recirculating mode.

■ A **ducted** system, where steam and smells are vented outside through the ceiling or wall, generally works better. However, installation is more costly and complex and involves knocking a hole in the ceiling or wall for the ducting pipe.

■ For people who can't install ducting — say in a unit or rented place — a **recirculating** system is an alternative, where the steam is circulated through odour-absorbing carbon filters back into the room. When used in this mode, the rangehood is generally less effective at sucking up steam and odours, as the carbon filter restricts the airflow. It's also more expensive to run, as the carbon filters need to be replaced regularly — see *Installation and maintenance*, below, for more on this.

WHICH ONES WORK BEST?

If you have a freestanding house and can base your choice purely on efficiency, go for a ducted system. All the rangehoods in our test worked better in ducted mode. In recirculating mode the fixed systems outperformed their retractable counterparts.

Installation and maintenance

Installing a rangehood can be fairly simple if you have some DIY skills, and provided there's a power point close by — if not, you'll need a licensed electrician to install one. Always follow the instructions carefully. You'll need an electric drill, some basic hand tools and, if possible, someone to help.

■ To install a rangehood in recirculating mode, mark on the wall, or in the kitchen cabinet, where to drill the holes. Some manufacturers supply a template for this, or you can use the rangehood itself. Observe minimum height distances from the cooktop that are given in the instructions. Fasten the screws while your helper holds the rangehood in position. Plug it in and it's ready to go.

■ Installing it in ducted mode is more complex and involves knocking holes into the wall or ceiling for the pipes. The manufacturer usually sells the ducting kit separately.



LIFE WEGMANN

DRAUGHTS

Even a small draught can adversely affect a rangehood's performance, as we found when walking past the stove during the tests. So you'd better keep windows and doors closed near the kitchen when using a rangehood on a windy day.

If possible, use smooth, non-flexible ducting (flexible ducting causes air turbulence, reducing the efficiency of the fan) and install it via the shortest route to the outside. Don't vent it into a wall cavity or a chimney or flue that carries combustible products from other sources.

- Converting a rangehood from recirculating to ducted mode is generally quite easy. You'll probably just have to remove the cover plate from the top or back of the unit and affix a collar with screws; attach a pipe to the collar and feed it through a hole in the wall or ceiling; and remove the carbon filter.
- To keep the rangehood working well, wash the mesh filter regularly according to the instructions (or replace the filter, if it's non-washable). The less grease and grime it contains, the better the airflow and efficiency.
- Rangehoods in recirculating mode have a carbon filter that needs to be replaced regularly. How often depends on your amount and type of cooking. Manufacturers' recommendations as to how often to replace it vary from every month to once a year, with every three to six months the most commonly mentioned. The cost of a replacement filter for the rangehoods we tested ranged from \$15 to \$69. So the costs of running a recirculating rangehood efficiently could mount to well over \$100 a year, considering you might have to replace the filter several times a year.

WHAT TO BUY

ROBINHOOD Sirocco RE6WH	\$179
ROBINHOOD Alto RA6WH BEST BUY	\$139
BLANCO BRFS601W	\$259
LEEMAC FS 301-2	\$289
* ROBINHOOD Grange II RGT6WH	\$229
* WESTINGHOUSE WRH603UW	\$249
WHIRLPOOL AKR 428 WH	\$259
FISHER & PAYKEL RH600SO WW (R)	\$349
ROBINHOOD Chateau RO6BL (R)	\$179
ROBINHOOD Vento RV6WH (R)	\$199

* Also recommended for use in recirculating mode.
(R) Retractable; all the others are fixed.

The 10 rangehoods in the *What to buy* list scored 80% for steam extraction in ducted mode. If you can't duct yours and want one that absorbs the steam and odours and recirculates the air, the two with an asterisk (*) scored 75% for steam extraction in recirculating mode.

Profiles

The rangehoods in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended or average retail, as supplied by manufacturers in February/March 2005.

ROBINHOOD SIROCCO RE6WH

Price: \$179

GOOD POINTS

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The exterior is very easy to clean.
- Very good controls.
- Comparatively low power consumption.

BAD POINTS

- The front edge is sharp at head height.



Robinhood Sirocco (fixed)



Robinhood Alto (fixed)



Blanco (fixed)



Leemac FS 301-2 (fixed)



Robinhood Grange (fixed)



Westinghouse WRH603UW (fixed)

PROFILES: TAMARA GRAHAM

LEEMAC FS 301-2

Price: \$289

GOOD POINTS

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The exterior is easy to clean.
- Good controls.
- Lights provide good visibility over the cooking area.
- The light globes are easy to replace.

BAD POINTS

- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively expensive.
- Comparatively high power consumption.
- Comparatively noisy in recirculating mode.
- Slightly sharp corners at head height.

ROBINHOOD GRANGE II RGT6WH

Recommended for recirculating as well as ducted mode.

Price: \$229

GOOD POINTS

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode, and good in recirculating mode.
- The exterior is very easy to clean.
- Good controls.
- Lights provide good visibility over the cooking area.

Bad points

- The light globes are fiddly to replace.
- Comparatively high power consumption.
- Comparatively noisy in both recirculating and ducted modes.

WESTINGHOUSE WRH603UW

Recommended for recirculating as well as ducted mode.

Price: \$249

GOOD POINTS

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode, and good in recirculating mode.
- The exterior is very easy to clean.
- Good controls.
- Lights provide good visibility over the cooking area.

BAD POINTS

- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively expensive.
- The light globes are fiddly to replace.
- Comparatively high power consumption.

WHIRLPOOL AKR 428 WH

Price: \$259

GOOD POINTS

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The exterior is easy to clean.
- Good controls.
- Lights provide good visibility over the cooking area.
- The light globes are easy to replace.

Bad points

- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively expensive.
- Comparatively high power consumption.
- Slightly sharp corners and edges at head height.

FISHER & PAYKEL RH600SO WW

Price: \$349

Good points

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively cheap.
- The mesh filter is very easy to access.
- Comparatively low power consumption.

Bad points

- Poor steam extraction in recirculating mode.
- The exterior is fiddly to clean.
- The light globe is fiddly to replace.
- Slightly sharp corners and edges at head height.



Whirlpool (fixed)



Fisher & Paykel (retractable)



Robinhoo Chateau (retractable)



Robinhoo Vento (retractable)

ROBINHOOD CHATEAU R06BL

Price: \$179

Good points

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively cheap.
- The mesh filter is very easy to access.
- Comparatively low power consumption.
- One of the quietest in recirculating mode.

BAD POINTS

- Poor steam extraction in recirculating mode.
- The exterior is fiddly to clean.
- The light globe is fiddly to replace.
- Slightly sharp corners and edges at head height.

ROBINHOOD VENTO RV6WH

Price: \$199

Good points

- Very good steam extraction in ducted mode.
- The carbon filter (for use in recirculating mode) is relatively cheap.
- The mesh filter is very easy to access.
- Comparatively low power consumption.
- One of the quietest in recirculating mode.

Bad points

- Poor steam extraction in recirculating mode.
- The exterior is fiddly to clean.
- The light globe is fiddly to replace.
- Slightly sharp corners and edges at head height.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- Steam extraction performance dropped off markedly for the rest of the rangehoods tested, with most just OK in ducted mode and poorer in recirculating mode.
- The **TECHNIKA PH26S/S** is one of the quietest in both modes, but unlike all the others in the test it has a non-washable grease filter, which you have to replace when it's grimy at a cost of \$12.60 (even in ducted mode). It also has sharp corners at head height and controls that are awkward to operate.

- In ducted mode, the **WESTINGHOUSE WRG6071W*12** is a bit better for steam extraction than the others not in the *What to buy* list, but it's one of the noisiest, and it works poorly in recirculating mode.
- The **LEEMAC FS 301-1** has good controls, but its performance is only average, and it has slightly sharp corners at head height.
- The **ELECTROLUX CHEF RRC603S** (and the technically identical **SIMPSON RDHR6** and **WESTINGHOUSE WRG605**) are among the worst performers in the test for both steam extraction and ease of use.

TABLE 1. RANGEHOODS IN DUCTED MODE (All rangehoods tested can also be used in recirculating mode. See Table 2, below, for results in recirculating mode.)

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Steam extraction score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Noise score (%)	4 Noise (dB)	5 Wattage (W)	5 Number of fan speeds	6 Type	7 Control location	Warranty (years)
ROBINHOOD Sirocco REGWH	77	80	75	68	60	100	2	Fixed	Front panel	2
ROBINHOOD Alto RA6WH	75	80	75	61	64	100	2	Fixed	Front panel	2
BLANCO BRFS601W	74	80	68	61	64	230	3	Fixed	Front panel	2
LEEMAC FS 301-2 (A)	74	80	68	62	63	325	3	Fixed	front panel	2
ROBINHOOD Grange II RGT6WH	74	80	73	57	66	335	3	Fixed	Front panel	2
WESTINGHOUSE WRH603UW (B)	74	80	73	55	67	330	3	Fixed	Front panel	2 (F)
WHIRLPOOL AKR 428 WH (C)	74	80	68	62	63	335	3	Fixed	Front panel	2
FISHER & PAYKEL RH600SO WW	73	80	65	61	64	100	2	Retractable	Under hood, front, R	1
ROBINHOOD Chateau RD6BL	73	80	65	61	64	100	2	Retractable	Under hood, front, R	2
ROBINHOOD Vento RV6WH	73	80	65	62	63	100	3	Retractable	Under hood, front, R	2
TECHNIKA PH16SJS	66	65	65	71	58	210	3	Fixed	Top of front panel	2
WESTINGHOUSE WRG607IW*12	66	70	63	55	67	340	3	Retractable	Pull out fascia	2 (F)
LEEMAC FS 301-1 (D)	65	65	65	64	62	170	3	Fixed	Front panel	2
ELECTROLUX CHEF RRC603S (E)	61	60	60	64	62	170	2	Retractable	Pull out fascia	2 (F)
SIMPSON RDHR6 (E)	61	60	60	64	62	170	2	Retractable	Pull out fascia	2 (F)
WESTINGHOUSE WRG605 (E)	61	60	60	64	62	170	2	Retractable	Pull out fascia	2 (F)

Watch your head and other safety matters

Just as we were testing rangehoods, one of our readers phoned with a sorry tale. "I'm amazed at how sharp the corners on some rangehoods are," he remarked. "I happen to be quite bald and have often bashed my head on these contraptions, sometimes causing bleeding."

If you, too, are of a certain height and tend to bash your head on the rangehood, take care when leaning over to reach a pot on a rear hotplate. And if you're buying a new one, check the profiles, page 46, which list any sharp edges and corners we found at the front of the rangehoods tested.

Another caution comes from some manufacturers, who warn that if you duct a rangehood and have a flued gas or slow-combustion heater (and it isn't a 'balanced flue' type) in or close to the kitchen, you must ensure there's adequate air venting into the room so that cooking fumes aren't drawn down the heating flue.

All the rangehoods tested passed electrical safety tests.

A retractable rangehood sits nicely flush with your cupboards when not in use, and the fan and lights come on when you pull it out. Unfortunately, none of the retractable models in this test worked as well as the fixed rangehoods in recirculating mode, and only three of the seven got a very good score for extracting steam when ducted.



What to look for

- Exterior.** It should be easy to clean and have no nooks and crevices where dirt and grease can build up. Fixed rangehoods with a smooth underside are generally easier to clean than retractable ones.
- Filter.** All rangehoods have a filter. Those made of aluminium mesh are relatively easy to clean and the least expensive, as non-washable filters need replacement and will incur ongoing costs. If you install a rangehood in recirculating mode it'll also need a carbon filter that has to be replaced regularly. For more on this see the last point in *Installation and maintenance*, page 45.
- Light.** Two globes generally provide better visibility than one over the cooking area. Globes should be easy to replace.
- Controls.** Sliding or pushbutton controls on the front panel are easy to reach and to operate. Some retractable models have controls on the underside of the hood. This is OK if you always use the same fan speed, as both fan and light come on automatically when you pull it out, but probably less convenient if you want to change it. On other retractable units, the further you pull out the hood, the higher the fan speed becomes ('pull out fascia' in the table).

Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
Robinho	179
Robinho	139
Blanco	259
Leemac	289
Robinho	229
Electrolux	249
Whirlpool	259
Fisher & Paykel	349
Robinho	179
Robinho	199
Technika	200
Electrolux	219
Leemac	199
Electrolux	189
Electrolux	189
Electrolux	189

* Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in February/March 2005.

R Right-hand side.

ns Not stated.

(A) Also available in stainless steel, \$349; and in 90 cm width \$359, stainless steel \$459.

(B) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

(C) Also available in stainless steel, \$279.

(D) Also available in stainless steel, \$299.

(E) These models are technically identical; we tested the Electrolux Chef RRC603S. To use them in recirculating mode, you need to install ducting above the rangehood up to the top of the kitchen cupboard; the steam is vented into the room just below the ceiling.

(F) Can be extended to five years for an additional \$60.

We fixed all rangehoods between two cupboards, 65 cm above the stovetop, and scored them for their steam extraction in both ducted mode and recirculating mode. The results are presented separately; see Table 1 for test results of the models in ducted mode and Table 2 for results in recirculating mode.

1 Overall score

This consists of:

■ Steam extraction: 60%

■ Ease of use: 20%

■ Noise: 20%

2 Steam extraction score

We measured how much steam the rangehoods extracted when simmering water in two saucepans on the two rear hotplates of an electric stove (70%), and on all four hotplates (30%).

3 Ease of use score

This includes the ease of cleaning the rangehood and mesh filter as well as the convenience of the controls, filter and light.

4 Noise

We measured noise at a height of 1.6 m and 1 m from the front edge, with the rangehood on the highest fan setting. The quieter the rangehood, the higher the score.

5 Wattage / number of fan speeds

We measured the rangehoods' wattage at the highest fan setting with the light on. Our test shows there's no correlation between wattage and performance, or the number of fan speeds.

6-7 Type / controls

See Which type?, page 44, for a description of the types of rangehood and What to look for, below left, for details about the controls.

TABLE 2. RANGEHOODS IN RECIRCULATING MODE (See Table 1 with results in ducted mode, above, for features and other details, and footnotes.)

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS		
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Steam extraction score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Noise score (%)	4 Noise (dB)	6 Type	Recommended filter replacement time (months)
WESTINGHOUSE WRH603UW (B)	72	75	73	62	63	Fixed	50
ROBINHOOD Grange II RGT6WH	71	75	73	59	65	Fixed	29
ROBINHOOD Alto RA6WH	65	60	75	71	58	Fixed	29
ROBINHOOD Sirocco RE6WH	64	60	75	66	61	Fixed	29
LEEMAC FS 301-1 (D)	63	60	65	68	60	Fixed	25
TECHNIKA PH16S/S	63	60	65	71	58	Fixed	22
BLANCO BRFS601W	62	60	68	64	62	Fixed	15
WHIRLPOOL AKR 428 WH (C)	62	60	68	62	63	Fixed	69
LEEMAC FS 301-2 (A)	61	60	68	59	65	Fixed	66
FISHER & PAYKEL RH600SO WW	51	40	65	68	60	Retractable	19
ROBINHOOD Chateau ROG6L	51	40	65	71	58	Retractable	19
ROBINHOOD Vento RV6WH	51	40	65	71	58	Retractable	19
ELECTROLUX CHEF RRC603S (E)	49	40	60	66	61	Retractable	25
SIMPSON RDHRG (E)	49	40	60	66	61	Retractable	25
WESTINGHOUSE WRG605 (E)	49	40	60	66	61	Retractable	25
WESTINGHOUSE WRG607IW*12	48	40	63	57	66	Retractable	50

COOKING IN BULK

None of the tested rangehoods coped well with steam extraction when four pots were kept at a rolling boil — which might in any case be an unlikely situation for most people. Too much steam escapes, especially from the pots on the front hotplates, which tend to stick out further than the rangehood.

aboutchoice

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We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a Best Buy. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted.

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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Fromagent Australia has recalled **Mauri Bon Taleggio Valsassina Cheese**, 2 kg block and random weights, with a use-by date of 7 March 05, imported from Italy.

The problem: It may contain *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause illness or miscarriage in pregnant women, and illness in young children, the elderly or people with low immune systems.

What to do: If you froze it for later use, don't eat it. Contact your GP if you have concerns about your health. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 0416 234 031 for more information.

FOOD: Pasta Time has recalled **Pumpkin Ravioli**, use-by date May 15 2005, packaged in a 600 g foam box wrapped in plastic.

The problem: Pumpkin and Walnut Ravioli has been incorrectly packed into the Pumpkin Ravioli packages, which may pose a risk to those who have an allergy or intolerance to walnuts.

What to do: If you froze it for later use, don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to walnuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (02) 9558 9132 for more information.

FOOD: Goodman Fielder has recalled **Uncle Tobys Le Snak Rice Crackers BBQ flavoured with Mild Salsa Dip**, 120 g, with best-before dates of 11 08 05 and 12 08 05.

The problem: Cheese-flavoured corn crackers may have been packed into the BBQ-flavoured packaging, and the product may pose a risk to those who have a milk protein allergy or intolerance.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to milk protein. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, email cac@uncletobys.com.au or phone 1800 025 768 for more information.

FOOD: Woolworths has recalled **Home Brand Nacho Cheese Flavoured Corn Chips**, 270 g bag, with best-before dates between 2 June 05 and 3 Sept 05 inclusive.

The problem: The product contains an undeclared allergen, gluten.

What to do: Return it to the place of

purchase for a refund, or call 1800 638 434 for more information.

FOOD: Coles and Bi-Lo have recalled **Coles Farmland Orange Crush Fruit Juice Cordial and Bi-Lo Fruit Juice Cordial Orange Crush**, 2 litres, with a best-before date of 8 February 2006, and sold in Coles and Bi-Lo stores in Queensland and northern NSW.

The problem: It may ferment and be unsuitable to drink and possibly burst.

What to do: Don't drink it. Check your fridge or pantry for any affected product, place it in a plastic bag and return it to the nearest Coles or Bi-Lo store for a refund, or call 1800 061 562 for more information.

FOOD: Kallis Bros has recalled **Seafood Crumbed Whiting Fillets**, ready to cook, 500 g plastic bag, all best-before dates between 20/10/06 and 29/10/06, and imported from Vietnam.

The problem: The product contains milk protein and egg, which aren't declared on the packaging.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TRAMPOLINE: Leisureworld has recalled **Jumping 14 foot Trampolines**, product code JX14WSA, sold in Rebel Sports between 9 December 2003 and 28 February 2005.

The problem: They may have a defect in the welding on the frame which may result in breakage during use.

What to do: Call 1800 335 399 or go to www.leisureworld.com.au for more information.

CANDLES: Rojo Collections Australia has recalled **Romance gel candles (cobalt blue), Wildfire gel candles (cobalt blue), Relaxation gel candles (red/brown)**, all packaged in a 7 cm by 6.5 cm square glass container, sold in Victoria.

The problem: The fragrance will separate from the gel over time, and the oil may catch on fire.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TOY: Homeware Products has recalled a **toy saxophone**, item number 581, a yellow plastic toy saxophone

approximately 30 cm in size; and **Musical Play Set**, item number 534, which is a blister pack containing three small plastic imitation instruments, both products sold in NSW and Queensland.

The problem: If dropped or damaged the products may produce small parts that pose a choking risk to young children.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHILDREN'S SHOES: Fantastic has recalled **Winnie the Pooh Flowers Jogger**, which are white with pink and lilac trims, with an elastic lace and an adjuster and plastic toggle on the end of the elastic to prevent the adjuster from being removed. The affected shoes have the following product codes printed on the label on the inside of the jogger: 3524 5865, 3524 5889, 3524 5896, 3524 5902 and 3524 5872.

The problem: The plastic toggles may detach and pose a choking risk to young children.

What to do: Stop using the shoes and remove them from the reach of children. Return them to Target, Target Country or Baby Target for a refund, or remove the elastic lace, toggle and adjuster and replace with a non-elastic lace.

CHILDREN'S SHOES: Oliver Footwear has recalled **AT's All Terrain 45 Series Safety Footwear Range**, sizes 5, 6 and 6.5.

The problem: The shoes don't provide the level of 'impact energy' resistance specified in the Australian standard.

What to do: Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

KETTLE: Salton has recalled **Russell Hobbs Mona Kettle**, model 3022 (polished stainless steel) and model 3023 (brushed stainless steel), which have been available since June 2003.

The problem: The kettle may leach lead into the water, which can cause illness or injury to infants and young children.

What to do: Stop using the kettle. Call 1800 190 400 to arrange to return it and obtain a refund.

CAR STANDS: Super Cheap Auto has recalled **Super Works Car Stands Pair**, 3000 kg and 5000 kg, models TT636N and TT633N, sold from July 2002 to March 2005.

The problem: The stands don't completely conform to the Australian standard, and their stability may be compromised.

What to do: Return them to Super Cheap Auto for a refund or call (07) 3205 8511 for more information.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY BOOK: Random House has recalled the **Spongebob Squarepants Movie: I'm Ready Colour and Activity Book** with water-expanding toys.

The problem: The two water-expanding toys included with the book may pose a choking risk to young children. There is no problem with the activity book.

What to do: Remove the toys from the reach of children and dispose of them, or return the book and toys to the place of purchase for a refund.

GARAGE DOOR: B & D Doors has recalled **Tilt-A-Door garage door fittings**, model 250T Commercial, 300T Commercial and 400T Commercial Track Type fittings, manufactured or sold between January 1999 and September 2004 for larger tilt-type garage door applications. The affected doors have the spring attachment welded onto the bearing, an anti-sway bracket is fitted and the door runs in horizontal tracks along the ceiling.

The problem: Spring failure may occur, posing a risk of injury or property damage.

What to do: Call 1800 339 372 between 9 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday to arrange for a service technician to call and modify the door free of charge.

CAR: Nissan has recalled **Nissan X-Trail vehicles**, models PS203 and PS206 with VIN numbers in the following ranges:

Model PS203: JN1BNT30A0 014793 to JN1BNT30A0 024706.
Model PS206: JN1BNT30A0 000006 to JN1BNT30A0 017012.

The problem: In PS203 models the catalytic converter honeycomb may break, and in the PS206 models the O₂ Sensor Boss may break.

What to do: Letters are being sent to affected owners, or contact your nearest Nissan dealer to arrange for repair free of charge.

\$7.50 COMBO

Present this voucher at the Candy Bar and pay only \$8 for a regular combo.

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We'd advise you *don't* use the voucher — you'll save yourself 50 cents.



Shouldn't that be 'pear' smoothie?

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IS SUGARCANE A FRUIT?

With 66% sugar and only 30% fruit, we'd have thought 'spreadable sugar' is a more apt description.

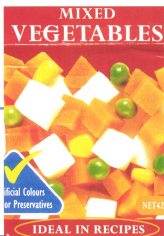
CARBOHYDRATES		
- TOTAL	10.0g	66.8g
- SUGARS	10.0g	66.6g
SODIUM	1mg	4mg
INGREDIENTS: SUGAR, RASPBERRIES (30.0%), GLUCOSE SYRUP FROM WHEAT, VEGETABLE GUM		



Lash Doubling Mascara duo, **new** Clinique Simply Body Butter 40ml and Clinique Simply Perfume Spray 4ml.

One bonus per customer, while stock lasts. Allergy tested. 100% fragrance free.

And the point of fragrance-free perfume is what, exactly?



Depends what the recipe is for, doesn't it?

Soup, probably. But chocolate mousse? Ewww.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to B Thomason. Thanks also to M Moore, W & J Foreman, M Lenzner, V Jones and G Sheridan for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.

RECYCLE WITH DELL - Only Dell offers a cash rebate for end-of-life computer equipment to each and every customer.



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Visit www.dell.com.au/recycle for full details or call Dell Recycling on 1800 465 890 (toll-free in Australia). Support our global concerted efforts to protect the environment.

Does not compute

In one sentence Dell 'offers a cash rebate' to 'each and every customer', in the next it contradicts itself — only those with working systems are in fact eligible to earn the cash rebate (and even that's a maybe). For everyone else, you'll be out of pocket.

Not that we're saying it's a bad thing — it's good to see initiatives that encourage the responsible disposal and recycling of hazardous and valuable components of computer hardware. It's just the wording we have a problem with.